

# THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

## A WEEKLY DEALING WITH THE DETECTION OF CRIME

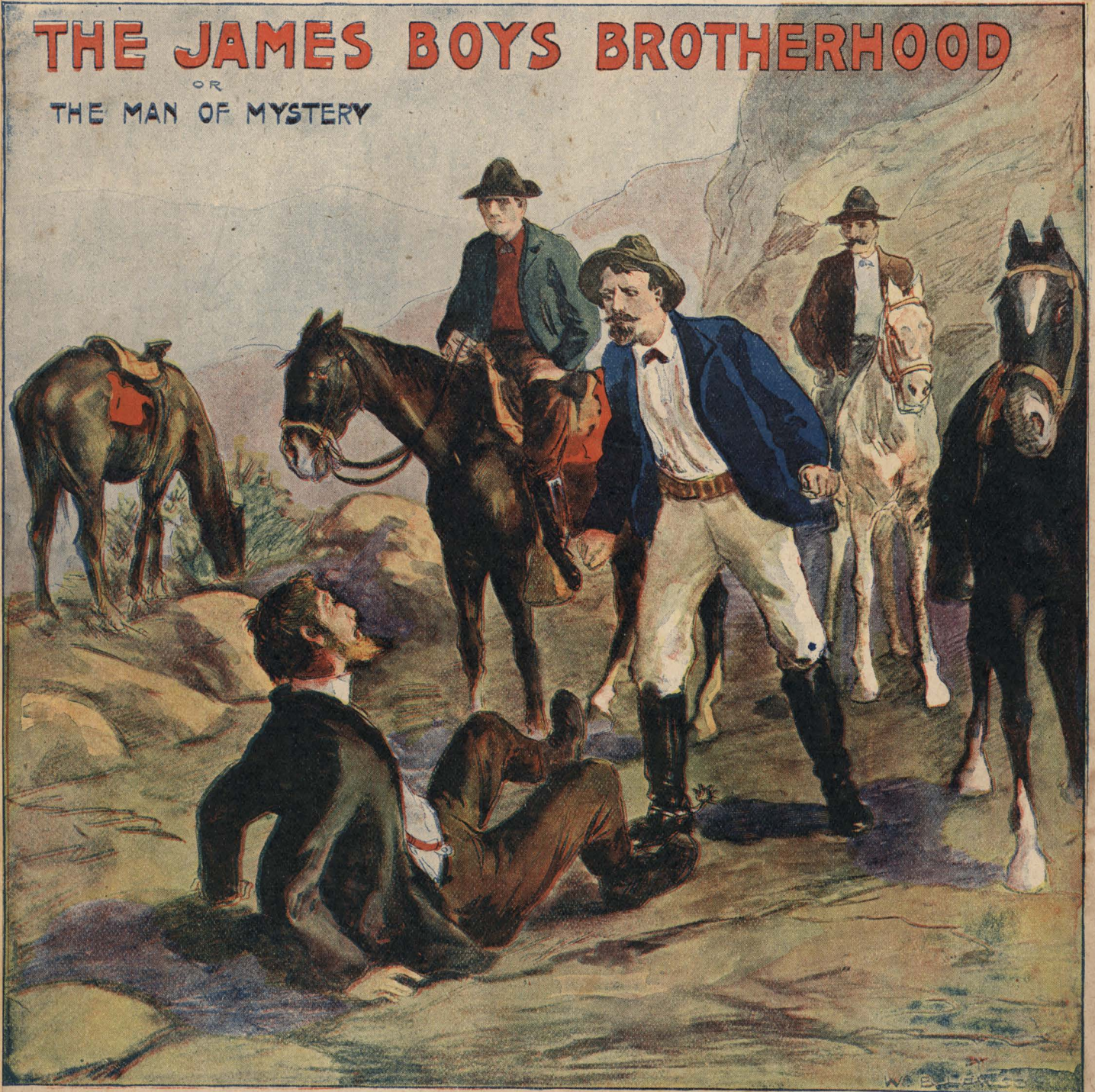
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**No. 45.**

*Price, Five Cents.*

### THE JAMES BOYS BROTHERHOOD

OR  
THE MAN OF MYSTERY



JESSE JAMES DELIVERED ANOTHER KICK NO GENTLER THAN THE FIRST. "GOL-DARN YE, LET UP!" EXCLAIMED THE STRANGER, ROLLING COMPLETELY OVER AND COMING UP IN A SITTING POSTURE.



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# THE JAMES BOYS' BROTHERHOOD;

OR,

## The Man of Mystery.

By W. B. LAWSON.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE MAN OF MYSTERY.

"Hist, Frank!—wasn't that a shot?"

The horsemen reined up abreast of each other, and listened. The younger, who had spoken, shifted his Winchester from its careless position across the saddle, and his keen eyes swept the desert space ahead of them to the point where the level was broken by a rugged descent.

It was midday, and the sun seemed to shrivel the scanty, dried herbage that marked the border of the desert. A little further on there would have been a patch of green, but for the coating of ashy dust blown across by the hot winds.

They had been following a dreary trail—a trail which would have been easily lost from the utter lack of landmarks, but for the fact that it was strewn with the bones of horses and men who had died trying to find the end of it.

For a full minute there was a silence, broken only by the harsh breathing of the thirsty horses.

The men did not greatly resemble each other in feature or expression. Yet they were brothers—Frank and Jesse James—the former a prince, the latter the king, of American bandits.

Bang!—and this time there could be no doubt about it.

"It is down in the gully yonder," exclaimed Frank.

"We'll find the meaning of the music, and maybe ring in a chorus," returned Jesse.

The jaded horses responded to the touch of spur, and it is possible that their parched nostrils scented water at the bottom of the gully.

A few swift bounds carried them to the crest of the descent. And here they halted briefly again.

Bang—bang—bang—bang!

Four reports in rapid succession—a sputter of



shots, in fact, like a volley hastily fired. Then a shout, then another rifle shot, then a yell.

The James boys sent their horses down into the gully at a plunge. And there, at a glance, they beheld the cause of the sounds, though it was to take something more than a glance to reveal the meaning of it.

A man stood with his back against some rocks, and a boulder in front of him as a barricade.

On the opposite side of the gully, and not more than twenty yards distant, were a half-dozen men, well armed, and all of them dodging about in a vain attempt to find a shelter that would give them protection equal to that secured by their single opponent.

The latter had a handsome rifle, and the muzzle of it was smoking. His face was dark with grime, with red underneath from the heated atmosphere and exertion. This was not all. His skin had a parched, leathery look, and his eyes had a glare in them that meant something more than the excitement of the fight.

The explanation of this, Jesse and Frank James both understood at the first glance.

The man was dying with thirst.

From his face, which was strange to them, they looked to his enemies.

One of these Jesse James recognized instantly.

That recognition decided the action of the two bandits.

"We help the bottom dog in the fight this time, without waiting to find out what sort of a cur he may be," were the words that Jesse James spoke.

"The bottom dog," repeated his brother.

The horses bounded onward, yells broke from the lips of the bandit brothers, and, at the same time, their guns began to talk.

Taken by surprise, bewildered, overwhelmed, the few of the unfortunate stranger's assailants who did not fall at the first fire, turned in a mad attempt to flee.

"Down with them—don't leave a man to tell the tale!"

Such was the harsh command of Jesse James.

It needed no repetition. The horses, scenting water, dashed up the gully like mad. The Winchester sputtered, the cries of terror and pain from the stricken crew added volume to the horrid din.

It ceased as abruptly as it had begun. Not a man

of the assailants of the unknown fugitive was on his feet. Only one had even a dying breath left in his body.

That one was the leader, whom Jesse James had recognized as one who, as an officer, had once given him a season of dodging and hiding through his persistence and the number of his followers.

The man was short, powerfully built, and with a relentless face. He was shot through the lungs, and coughed up a mouthful of blood as the James boys came up to him.

"Well, Sibley, it is my call this time, and I reckon you are about out of it!"

The dying man looked up. The expiring spark of life that remained in his nervous frame flared up, and he half-rose to a sitting posture, at the same time fixing his gaze on the face of Jesse James.

"You—you?" he gasped.

"I, this time. But you've no cause to complain, for I gave you a short term of misery. You won't live ten minutes, Sibley. Why were you and your crew shooting at that poor devil yonder? Who is he?—tell me that, if you have wind enough left for it."

Sibley opened his lips, but he was growing gray around them, and his eyelids quivered.

"That—that——" he began. Then he coughed again, and the words he would have uttered were drowned in the crimson flood that poured from his lips.

Sibley sank back, and Jesse James at the same time bent quickly and eased his head with one arm. He waited a moment, and then said to his brother:

"Get a spoonful from your flask down his throat, Frank. I want to get the name and something about that man they were running down. Quick!—he won't last a minute."

Frank obeyed. Sibley swallowed the liquor, and once more his eyes opened. But he tried in vain to speak. The effort brought another paroxysm of coughing—brief, and fatal.

He grew heavy against the arm of Jesse James, and the staring eyes saw nothing.

"Curse the luck!" growled the bandit king, and he let the clay fall to the earth, of which it was formed.

"You didn't get the name, then? Well, what does it matter, so long as the fellow can answer for him-



self. See, he has crawled out from behind the boulder that kept the bullets out of him."

What Frank James said was true of the stranger.

The latter, during the brief interval taken up by the annihilation of his enemies, had dropped his weapon and sank, or fallen, upon all fours, to crawl toward the deeper part of the gully where the water trickled. Perhaps, like the horses, he could smell it.

But he could not crawl.

The necessity for self-defense past, he no longer had the power to stir from his position.

The James brothers sprang to his side.

The elder lifted the man up; but the eyes of the latter were almost as fixed and staring as were those of the officer whom they had just killed.

"He's a goner," said Frank.

"Let's see if he has a bullet in him first. It is plain that he is dying for drink; but if that is all there may be a chance for him. He was making a nervy fight of it, and I want to find out what the rub was that sent that cursed hound of a Sibley on his track."

Jesse James gave the stranger a hasty examination.

"There is hardly a scratch on him that I can find, and he certainly hasn't bled a drop. We'll try water."

To fetch a cup of the clear water that flowed through the lowest part of the gully was but the work of a moment for Jesse James.

The energy and persistence of the latter was as great in the saving of life as it was in the destroying of it, when he chose to so direct it.

The water, poured betwixt the parched and bleeding lips of the unknown fugitive, was swallowed, and a husky sound, which might have been an inarticulate call for more, came from his throat.

The refreshing fluid was poured down, little by little, until the man responded sufficiently to drink voluntarily.

More was fetched, and drank. Some was dashed in the poor fellow's face, on his hands, poured down the outside of his neck, for he seemed to be fairly baked with the heat and lack of water—a lack which is quickly and terribly felt in the hot, rarified atmosphere of that locality.

It was some minutes before the man revived sufficiently to speak. Then his first words seemed to have little meaning."

"Cover the tracks! cover the tracks!" he cried, with a wild gesture.

"They're wiped out, pilgrim, and you've nothing to worry about," said Jesse James.

The eyes of the stranger met those of the bandit chief, with an expression in them like that of sudden terror.

"You—you?" he gasped, in a questioning tone.

"I'm all right, and it hasn't been your track that I have been following. I don't reckon it would be much good to the gentry of my cloth to chase your sort. And that Sibley—the officer that was after you—is done for. You've nothing to fear. So brace up."

The stranger continued to stare for a moment. Then his eyes closed, his head fell back, his muscles relaxed.

He had swooned.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE TREASURE BELT.

"Things all seem to work against our finding out much about this man," remarked Jesse James, as the stranger sank into absolute unconsciousness.

"Go through his pockets," suggested Frank.

This suggestion was acted upon.

A scrap of paper was found, and on it was written the single name of Talcott.

This was in a pocket. There was also a leather purse containing between two and three dollars in silver.

This Jesse restored to the pocket from which it had been taken.

"Going to let him keep that, eh?" said Frank.

"Until I know more about him, and then, if I wanted it, I would tell him to pass it over. But I want you to take a good look at his face, and see if you ever saw it before."

The elder brother obeyed. He gazed long and penetratingly into the unconscious face.

"I—reckon I've seen one mighty like it, somewhere, Jess."

"So have I."

"But when and where, gets me. I can't seem to fix it clear in my head."

"The same here."

"That's thundering queer, Jess. We aren't the kind to get faces into our brain-pans, and then forget



where they came from. It may be, though, that he only resembles somebody we've seen."

"Who does he resemble, then? It ought to be as easy to remember one as the other."

"That's right."

"It means, then, that we have either seen his face or one resembling it under conditions that fixed its features or some points about them in our minds, but, at the same time, we couldn't have known the man, or had anything to do with him in any way. That name we found in his pocket may not be his. But we can call him by it till we find out better. Think I'll look him over a little more while he is out of trim to make objection to the liberty."

Jesse James proceeded to partially strip the unconscious man, with a view to finding if he had anything more concealed about his person.

A sudden exclamation broke from the bandit's lips.

"Look at this!" he cried.

Around the waist of the fugitive, buckled on underneath his shirt, and next to his body, was a belt.

The latter was thick and bulky, made of leather, and evidently stuffed with papers of some sort.

"What is it?" demanded Frank James.

"Looks like a treasure belt."

"Full of gold, perhaps! He may have been a prospector, who struck it rich up in the mountains, and who is trying to carry away the little fortune he has found."

"Strip open the belt, and let's see what there is inside of it."

"Easy, Frank—we may not want to keep the stuff, whatever it may be. But we'll know what it is, just the same."

With the point of his knife, the outlaw chief ripped open a short space in the seam of the belt.

He stared into the opening he had made for an instant, and then unbuckled and stripped off the belt.

"Money—crammed full of it!" cried Jesse.

"Let me see."

The belt was handed over to the elder brother. The latter ripped the opening a little longer, and pulled out the first scraps of paper that his fingers touched.

"It is money, sure enough—and good money, at that, if my eyes tell me true."

He took out four bills; all were tens. He felt in the opening for more, and drew out a twenty.

"Sixty dollars, and we've only begun to work the

diggings. At that rate, there must be a sizable fortune stowed away in that belt."

Had the bandit brothers been ordinary thieves, or like the crooks and thugs of the Eastern cities, they would have made short work of the stranger now completely at their mercy, and taken possession of the rich treasure which they had found on his person.

But they were of a different sort.

They did not hesitate to empty the belt of its contents, and to count the money.

There was more than ten thousand dollars.

Jesse James was something of an expert in the matter of identifying good and spurious paper money, as well as base coins, and he did not hesitate to pronounce the little fortune in the stranger's treasure belt to be as good as could have been drawn from any bank.

The belt had to be ripped open almost its entire length before all the money could be taken out of it. When it had been counted, it was returned intact, and, with needle and thread, which the outlaws always carried in their kit of utensils when traveling, Frank quickly sewed up the belt again.

It was then buckled in place, and the stranger's clothes put on.

This was hardly done before the fugitive manifested signs of returning consciousness.

The brothers looked into each other's eyes.

"We are picking up candidates for a new brotherhood," said the younger man, in a low voice. "It is for special work that we want them, and there is hardly a man in our old gang that we would dare to take into it. What we want is the aristocrats of the hold-up gentry. They must be slick men, able to pass among gentlemen in any city or town. What is equally important is that it should be for their interest to stick to us, and have as good reasons for avoiding all kinds of officers as we have. Do you reckon, Frank, that this man made that boodle he carries with him in a fair game? Or does that have something to do with his being run down by Sibley and his crew of hounds?"

There was a faint smile on the lips of Jesse James as he asked this question.

"There isn't much doubt, I reckon, on that score."

Before more conjectures could be offered the unknown fugitive opened his eyes.

They met the glance of Jesse James first, and there



he saw, what others have seen, when this remarkable man was not in a hostile mood, the light of a sentiment which came near to kindness.

And that first impression, coming to him when his mind was clearing of the fog which had been over it, hastened the return of a fuller consciousness, possibly, than had been his for some hours.

"Who—who are you?" he huskily asked.

"Another hungry pilgrim who has been traveling the same trail that you have, I reckon," was the reply, spoken in a voice that was as reassuring as the expression.

"You have been giving me water?" the stranger murmured, gratefully.

"Not before you needed it. This man with me is my brother, and we're all in the same boat. We anted up at about the right minute to take a hand in the game you were making such a plucky play at."

The stranger rose to a sitting posture, and his eyes looked out toward the spot where his enemies had been. He could see the stark forms lying where they had fallen.

"You killed them—you took my part in the fight!" he exclaimed, in evident astonishment.

"You seemed to be the under dog in the fight, and it is our way to put in our play on that side, unless there are special reasons for not doing it."

"Well, I never expected to have any man strike a blow in my behalf again, even to save my miserable life!"

"A miserable life, eh? Yet you were trying to hang on to it, and putting up a pretty good show at that, for a lone hand."

"Yes, a man will fight hardest when he seems to have the poorest use for living."

"What name might we call you by?"

"Call me Talcott."

"And where were you bound when you got stranded on this devil's strip of sand and sun?"

"For the mountains."

"Prospecting?"

"What is that? You mean gold hunting?"

"Yes."

"I might be glad to find gold. There was a time when I thought it was the greatest thing in the world—the only prize worth fighting and working for."

"You thought pretty near right, according to my reckoning."

"But I lost everything else in the chase. Friends—everything."

"Likely. And you would have lost them just the same, only a mighty sight quicker, if you had gold to start with, and lost that."

"You talk like a man who is either hungry or broke for cash. Which of the two kinds of pickle are you in?"

"Neither. I was dying of thirst, though. Give me more water, won't you?"

"Right here, and drink hearty."

The stranger did not stop until he had satisfied his thirst. Then he seemed to have a return of physical, as well as mental vigor. He rose to his feet, and an alert expression came into his eyes—the look a man comes to carry with him when he expects a foe to come up behind him.

The stranger was unquestionably a hunted man.

"You killed them all?" he asked.

"Every man of them."

"Then others will be on your track. You should have waited for them to give an account of me."

Jesse James laughed, and his brother joined in the mocking apology for mirth.

"We knew them—or their trade, which amounts to the same thing. Talcott—if that's your name, which we don't care a curse—give a guess at our names. You look like a Yankee. If you guess wrong, we'll set you right."

"I haven't the faintest idea. I may never have heard of you."

"Every man has heard of us—or pretty near it—all over the country."

"I could never hazard a guess."

"We are the James brothers. And I am Jesse!"

The stranger fell back, with a low ejaculation.

One hand flew involuntarily to the girdle underneath which was the treasure belt. The other grasped a revolver.

Again Jesse James laughed.

"The boodle is all right, stranger, and we've counted it. Don't pull the shooter; better to strike up a partnership. What do you say?"

## CHAPTER III.

### THE MAN WHO WAS KICKED.

Talcott—as we will call the stranger until we know better—did draw the shooter. But two were



looking at him before he could fetch it half-way up to a level.

"Drop it, or be dropped!"

The tones of the bandit king, which had been so kind and persuasive a moment before, had become as hard as steel.

The fugitive was a strong-willed man, and he had been trained for some time in the school of danger. But he dropped his gun.

"Up with your dukes!"

They went up—the hands of this man, who a little while before had defied a half-dozen pursuers, and would have died rather than surrender to them.

But there was no quiver in his voice as he said:

"Take the miserable stuff, if you want it! Then shoot, and throw my carcass to the coyotes!"

Frank James took from the person of the stranger the revolver. His Winchester lay on the ground, where he had dropped it before he lost consciousness.

Then Jesse laughed again, and said:

"Now, you are safer, Talcott. You see I'm bound not to see you die."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I hardly ever let a man live who has tried to pull a gun on me, as you did just now. But I reckon you're a bit rattled, and then, we're two to one. We aren't afraid of you, Mr. Talcott—that isn't why we take your shooters. We don't want you to get careless, that's all."

"Why don't you take the money?" retorted the other.

"Why didn't we take it when we found and counted the rags? Ask that."

"That is so. I suppose it is some point about your outlaw code."

"Outlaw code!" repeated Jesse James, and again he laughed.

Then the mocking smile left his face, and he added:

"Were you going to give an account of yourself, or not? I reckon you owe us that much."

"If you are asking me to tell you why I chance to be in this part of the country, and with a crew of human bloodhounds on my trail, I will have to decline to answer."

"All right—that's a square way of putting it. It's a point in your favor. You say you were going toward the mountains. Was it to any mountain town or camp?"

"No. I was going to the place I call home—a hidden spot, where I have lived for almost a year."

"To keep out of the way of the law—we tumble to that. We were going to the mountains, too. There will be others there, at a rendezvous, but the party will be small and select."

Jesse James smiled grimly.

"We've got to move on, Mr. Talcott," he said. "You had a horse, I take it?"

"He has gone up the gully a bit to feed, and get out of the way of bullets, probably. He wouldn't be likely to go far."

"Well, we'll stop here long enough to take in a little provender, and then proceed on our journey. You are invited to become one of us. The shooting you did at Sibley's gang and the boodle in the belt are your passports. What do you say?"

Talcott hesitated.

"You want to make of me a member of your gang?"

"That's the program."

"I don't exactly like it. Do you know, I was a gentleman until——"

Jesse James turned a terrible face upon the fugitive.

"You claim to belong to a higher order of the cut-throat and thief than I do, curse you!" he cried.

"Not that—not that—believe me! No, I doubt not but I deserve a worse penalty at law than you. But I feel myself unfit to face the life you lead. I might fight desperately for life or liberty, as I did when you first saw me; but you want men to be aggressive—who will follow where you may lead."

The fury faded from the countenance of Jesse James, but an expression remained which would have been a warning to the stranger had he known the bandit king better. The chief turned to his brother, and said:

"We'll eat, Frank. You will join us, Mr. Talcott. In a quarter of an hour we will be on the road again, and you will go where we do. As for the gentleman airs, you will get them rubbed off before you are many days older."

The sun was sinking, and already the gully was in shadow.

The horses had been helping themselves to grass and water, and were already sufficiently refreshed to permit of a resumption of the journey.

Talcott ate with the bandit brothers, and his face



assumed the hard, drawn look which it had been accustomed to wear habitually for some time. He continued to drink thirstily, and the vigor and alertness of his movements showed that he was nearly restored to his normal physical health.

His face still showed the results of the ordeal through which he had passed; but there was a different luster in his eyes, and, furtively observing him, Jesse James mentally decided that the mysterious stranger was a man of remarkable ability.

"A high-toned devil from the States that got into a crooked path, and is now keeping shady," was the mental verdict of the bandit king.

"He is a sharp man, and a slick one, I reckon, and if we ring him into the right sort of business may be valuable to us. If he plays double—send him up the flume and scoop the jackpot that he is guarding so jealously."

They were soon ready to resume their journey.

Nothing more was said about Talcott becoming a member of the bandit brotherhood, which was being formed. It was a matter in which Jesse James' will was to be the law.

As they proceeded up the gully it rapidly deepened until it became a gorge. This, as all seemed to understand, eventually formed a pass through a mountain spur, beyond which was a new mining bonanza—or, at least, the story of one.

Before the twilight, which lasted longer in the gorge than on the plain, had ended, Jesse James abruptly reined in his horse, and as quickly flung himself from the saddle. He was several horse-lengths in the lead.

His attention had first been called to a miserable little cayuse which was nuzzling at the scanty tufts of herbage along one side of the gorge.

The animal whinnied, and gazed in stupid surprise at the big horse of the bandit. At the same time the latter observed the form of a man lying almost under the feet of the cayuse.

In an instant Jesse James flashed a light on to the face of the unknown, who seemed to be sound asleep. Then he gave the sleeper a kick in the ribs which was not all gentleness.

The sleeper grunted, rolled over, then sat up, his lank body swaying unsteadily from side to side, his eyes blinking at the light held by Jesse James.

"Wake up, pilgrim, and give an account of yourself!" ordered the bandit chief.

At that instant his brother and Talcott, who had been riding side by side, came up.

"What have you stirred up here, Jess?" queried Frank.

"A humble bum, I reckon. Come, wake up!"

Jesse delivered another kick, no gentler than the first. It sent the stranger over on his side, and a dismal howl issued from his lips.

"Gol darn ye, let up!" he exclaimed, rolling completely over and coming up in a sitting posture again.

The speech was that of the far East, and the nasal tones proclaimed the stranger to be from some remote district in New England—probably Maine or Vermont.

The utterance, as well as other evidences, indicated also that the man was somewhat tipsy, although the worst of his condition was doubtless left behind with the beginning of his slumbers.

One big, hairy hand fumbled after a weapon, but he was so slow about it that Jesse James could have blown his head off a half-dozen times during the process.

"When you get the gun out, stranger, you'll pass it here," ordered the bandit king. And, as the man looked again, he saw that he was "covered," and that there was not the faintest show for him to get in a first shot.

"Hand it out, muzzle toward you, man, or I take no chances," cautioned Jesse.

And the weapon of the stranger was delivered in correct form and position.

"Now, stand up."

The stranger obeyed, but staggered before he got squarely on to his feet.

"What in darnation do ye want of me?" he now demanded.

"An account of yourself. Who are you, where are you bound, where from, what is your business?—four simple questions, easy to answer. See that you make the answers straight, for, as I travel through the country, I leave a trail strewn with dead liars all the way."

"Great gosh!—yeou needn't be so tarnation snappy with a man, need ye? I hain't done nothin' to ye, and I wasn't goin' to. But ye can't blame a man for bein' sorter bewildered and flusterated, to be woke up with a kick in the ribs, can ye?"

Frank James was laughing, Jesse smiled grimly.



but Talcott eyed the stranger with singular intentness.

"Answer the questions, for we are in a hurry to move on," commanded the leader.

"Who am I? Wall, they call me Lias Ham when I'm to home. Where am I going? To a new gold camp over yonder somewheres, if I only git there with a whole neck. Where from? Presque Isle, 'Roostook caounty, State o' Maine. My business? Wall, I'm darned if that question don't git me, in view of the fact that I busted up in the last business I sot out on, and hain't busted in on anything new yit. There, I've gi'n ye the whole yarn, straight as I can draw it, and if it don't suit ye, darned if I can help it."

"How long have you been snoozing here, think you?" asked Jesse James, without making any comment on the speech of Lias Ham.

"I dunno. It 'pears to be gittin' into the night, and I guess it wasn't much after noon when I got so tarnation tired that I jest tumbled off my hoss and went to sleep."

"Got any more whisky?"

"Not a darned drop!"

With this the stranger cast a half-sheepish look at the faces of Frank James and Talcott. The latter was still studying his face in that strangely intent manner.

"Get on to your cayuse and ride along with us. Quick about it, for we have many miles to make before sunup."

Lias Ham mounted. Then he rode up beside Jesse James and asked:

"Say—got a chaw of terbarker?"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE THREAT AGAINST LIAS HAM.

From a half-score of rough throats rose cries of startled dismay, mingled with gruff notes of defiance from two or three.

It was just after sunrise. The party led by Jesse James had emerged from the deeper part of the gorge into a little valley, which was almost entirely walled in by a natural barrier of rocks.

There a small party of men fresh from the new diggings had stopped for the previous night, and were now breaking camp.

The eagle eyes of Jesse James, always on the look-

out, were seldom surprised by a discovery of this sort. And the first glance told him of the character of the little party upon which they had chanced.

He was not of the kind who hesitate when they ought to decide. He decided on the instant, and if there was a blunder somebody beside himself would suffer for it.

A wave of the hand was sufficient as a signal to his brother. But to Talcott and Lias Ham a word had to be given.

"There's good plunder for all if we corral the crew out yonder," he said. "I will lead, and you, with your Winchester, will put in the same kind of service that you see me dealing out. Share and share alike, when it comes to making the final divvy. Quick, now!—show the stuff you're made of!"

Without waiting for a reply, Jesse James rode back to the side of Lias Ham.

"You keep to the rear with that cayuse of yours, or you'll get the critter filled full of lead. Mind what I say, will you?"

"Tarnation tough!" grumbled Ham.

But he fell to the rear, perhaps for more than one good reason.

Then Jesse and his brother dashed down on the camp of miners, yelling and firing like demons, their horses entering into the spirit of the attack as do firemen's horses, when called to the duty for which they have been trained.

This was the first warning the miners had of their danger, and it was little wonder that they were thrown into instant confusion.

Talcott, with evident reluctance, followed the lead of the bandits, and his Winchester joined in the chorus.

Whether or not any of the miners fell as his victims was a question whose answer it would have been hard to prove.

The miners rallied quickly, although three of their number had been shot dead at almost the first discharge.

A command to surrender, or no quarter, rang from the lips of the bandit leader, as he rode down on the miners like a whirlwind.

Three of the gold hunters flung up their hands, letting their weapons drop to the ground. But the others turned at bay, and began popping at their assailants in the frantic, useless way exhibited by brave, but panic-stricken men.



After a scattered volley at their assailants, the miners who did not fall under the deadly fire of the relentless marksmen, sprang to their horses and started to flee across the narrow valley.

"Down with the obstinate devils, for they choose death to surrender!" rang out the crisp tones of Jesse James.

The chase was brief, but terrible. Two more of the miners fell. The others—two in number—dropped their rifles and flung up their hands in token of yielding, even though their horses continued in the wild flight across the plain.

Talcott fell to the rear at this stage of the pursuit. At the same time Lias Ham came up with him, his long legs dangling down the sides of the little animal which he rode, so that his feet nearly touched the ground.

The gaze of the two men met.

"I'll say one thing for ye, mister," said Ham, with a faint grin lighting his cadaverous face.

"Say it then!"

"If yeou really tried to shoot them miners to kill, then yeou're a tarnation poor shot."

"How do you know?"

"Because there wa'n't a darned one of them that you aimed at 'peared to be hit."

"You were mighty particular to figure all that out."

"The Ham family is all partick'lar, even when they're to home, down in Maine," grinned Lias.

"Let me tell you something," returned Talcott, his eyes taking a glitter like that of steel.

"Aeout with it, then!"

"If I were to mention to Jesse James that you were so particular about watching every move I or they make you wouldn't live to tell your yarn in any other district."

"Then if yeou think a great deal of me yeou won't be likely to mention it."

"I don't think over-much of you. You are not what you seem."

"Nuther air yeou, if I'm figgerin' straight."

"If you are a spy, the James brothers shall have their way with you. They stand by me, and I'll stand by them."

"Gosh all hemlock, mister, don't go for to pullin' your shirt off, 'cause there's quite a breeze blowin' daown from the mountings, and it might blow a hole in ye! I ain't said I was a spy, and I ain't said what

yeou was, and when it comes to a pinch maybe it would be handy for one of us to have t'other of us raound to help him die peaceful. There, them outlaw fellers is comin' this way, and if we don't want the risin' sun to shine through a lot of holes in our bodies we'd better quit bein' confidential."

"I shall tell Jesse James to keep an eye on you—that you're playing some kind of a blind game!" was the grim threat of the man of mystery.

The miners had a sack of gold with them, the combined accumulations of the whole party. The value could not be exactly estimated, but it made a fairly rich haul, and so desperately in the end had the miners fought for their fortune that only one out of them all remained to tell the tale, if even he were permitted finally to go at liberty.

That one was a man whom Talcott had wounded, and over whom the man of mystery was at this moment bending in an attempt to alleviate suffering and impart a hope of life.

"Yes," the mysterious Talcott said, as he banded the miner's wound, "I shot you, but not to kill. By dropping you with a wound, you were saved from a fatal shot from one or the other of my companions. But I did not intend to make the hurt quite so serious."

"You saved my life, then."

"I saved your life, stranger, but you are not to take that as an indication of treachery against the James boys, whom I now, for the first time, acknowledge as my leaders. I can follow them without agreeing to imitate them in all things. They may have their ways and I mine, and no quarrel between us. Do you see the point?"

"Yes. But it counts just the same that you saved my life, and I am grateful for it."

"All right—let it stop there. You aren't very badly off in the way of a hurt, and you will be able to take care of yourself if allowed to go at liberty. But that is something that I can't have my say about. You came from the new bonanza diggings, as they are called?"

"Yes. And now the little pile I had made is cleaned out!" said the miner, bitterly.

"Go back, and make a new one. Your partners can't do that."

"And they were good men, every one of them. We had sworn to stand by each other until we were all back among our friends."



## CHAPTER V.

## IN TALCOTT'S CAVE.

"It would have been better had you fought it out in what they call out here a lone-hand game. I dropped friendships of every kind more than a year ago. What do they amount to? If you do well, and one of them does ill, he drags you down. A man can climb a ladder better if he doesn't have too many hanging on to his legs. Brace up. Start alone, and with a new deal, and a lone hand you'll win."

Jesse James came up at this instant, and so Talcott did not observe the vengeful light that flashed from the eyes of the miner. The latter had risen to a sitting posture, and it was evident that, as the pain from his hurt diminished, he was fast regaining his normal strength of body and force of will.

"We'll put a rope round this man," said Jesse, quietly, "lead him to the edge of the valley, tie him to a tree, and leave him to shift for his life. He'll get clear in time, and we won't be hampered with dragging him with us alive, or having his ghost haunt your tender dreams at night. Come, and work fast."

Talcott helped to bind the miner with the rope, mounted his own horse, and then the little party moved at a moderate pace across the narrow valley, having mounted the miner on one of the horses belonging to his own party.

No questions were asked, and no comments made.

When the limit of the valley was reached, the suggestion of Jesse James was carried out to the letter. The miner was left bound to a tree, but in such a manner that, with patience and persistence, he would in time be able to secure his own liberty, catch his horse and flee in any direction that he might choose.

But Jesse James left him with this warning:

"If I ever see you again—if you try to cross my path for purpose of revenge—you will get the lead in your brain."

They penetrated the belt of timber for a short distance. Then, with Lias Ham riding at his side, the bandit king said to his brother:

"We'll hang this long-legged pilgrim to yonder limb. Then he can give his last kick with his feet clear!"

The grim threat of the chief of the outlaws came as a complete surprise to Lias Ham, however shrewd the latter might be.

Not until then had Jesse James given any intimation that he had a suspicion as to the character of the lank Yankee.

The latter heard the words of the leader with unconcealed dismay.

"Yeou—yeou don't mean it, mister!" he gasped.

The cold eyes of Jesse James met his gaze with unfeeling directness.

"And why not?"

"Because I hain't done nothin' to be hung for."

"That's why I'm going to hang you."

"I can't see how yeou figger it aout that way."

"I have done some things that they do hang men for, and for that reason I don't propose to end my days dancing a rope jig."

Ham could not seem to realize that the bandit leader actually contemplated carrying out his terrible threat. But at that moment Frank James coolly uncoiled a lariat, fashioned a noose at one end after the true hangman's pattern, and then coiled it for a throw.

"Will you have your feet tied together or not?" Frank grimly inquired, directing the words to Lias Ham.

The latter had suddenly grown deathly pale. Could it be possible, he asked himself, that he was staring death in the face, after he had taken every clever precaution to prevent suspicion?

He glanced in mute appeal toward Talcott.

But on his face, to his surprise, he saw a grim smile that was even more relentless than the steel-like tones of the James brothers.

The truth was that Ham had until then suspected that Talcott was ready at any moment to show himself to be a traitor to the James boys. Ham could not believe that this man of mystery, with his airs of gentlemanly bearing, could be in sympathy with the merciless villainy of the noted bandits.

"Just as you choose, about having your legs bound together," added Frank. "Some prefer it when they're hung, and some don't. A man doesn't sprawl round so much with his legs when the noose gets tight, and so makes a better appearance, as it were,



at the windup. It's a matter of taste, and some men are particular about these little points. Jess and I are accommodating, as far as we can be."

"Good God!" gasped Ham.

He seemed to have become suddenly too weak to sit erect, but before he could fall the noose was over his head, and that held him in place, with the firm hand of Frank James at the other end of the rope.

"Lend a hand here, Mr. Talcott," said Jesse.

The man of mystery hesitated.

"Lend a hand, Talcott!" was the peremptory command.

The stranger obeyed. Ham was eased down from the back of the cayuse, and, not having signified his preference about the tying of his feet, they were bound by Frank James, while Talcott easily restrained the feeble struggles which the man attempted to make.

Then he was hauled toward the tree, and the end of the lariat tossed over the limb designated by Jesse James.

Then, for the first time, Lias Ham seemed to revive from the weakness of terror.

He uttered a wild yell, strained at his bonds, and thrashed about with his arms with such a prodigious show of strength and fury that Talcott was knocked full-length to the ground, and Frank James escaped the same mishap only by nimble dodging.

Then the bandit chief took a hand in the business. He stepped up, with his revolver, and tapped Lias Ham on the head with the butt of it.

That rendered the balance of the programme a simple one, since the victim could make no further resistance.

Talcott, although he seemed to perform his part in the hanging with disgust, nevertheless adjusted the noose finally before the victim was hauled clear of the ground.

At that instant there was the sound of a rifle shot coming from a point further on in the belt of timber.

"Fasten him there, and we'll find what that means," cried Jesse James. And he set the example of leaping into his saddle and riding at a dashing pace toward the spot whence the rifle report proceeded.

Frank James passed the end of the rope around a smaller tree and deftly knotted it securely. Then he sprang to the saddle. Talcott was not a half-minute

behind him. And so the trio rode through the timber as fast as the nature of the track would allow.

As they advanced there was a second rifle shot, but this time it seemed to proceed from a yet more distant point, and the James boys halted briefly for a consultation.

"We aren't far from the bonanza gold camp," said Jesse. "But that isn't what worries me. We are also drawing close to our place of rendezvous, and I didn't care about kicking up too much of a rumpus until we get settled down to something."

For the first time Talcott openly expressed curiosity as to their final course.

"We enter a rather rugged piece of country beyond the timber, don't we?" he asked.

"About as rugged as they make them."

"Is there more than one pass through to the gold camp?"

"Only one direct pass. But there is more than one way of getting there."

"But it isn't to the camp that you are going?"

"We're going to our rendezvous first. Then the rest of the programme depends on circumstances that I can't be sure about in advance."

Talcott asked no more, and what his feelings may have been as to the subject, his face gave no sign, although Jesse James observed him more keenly than he had done before.

Frank James, too, who was, on the whole, rather more suspicious by nature than his brother, frequently cast furtive glances at the face of the stranger, for there could be no doubt but Talcott was keeping his own affairs to himself, even while he affected to be willing to accept the situation as a member of the James boys' gang—or, rather, the new "brotherhood" which was being organized.

If Talcott observed the surveillance under which he was placed, he seemed indifferent to it. Indeed, he appeared almost absolutely careless in the matter of what his companions might think or do.

As they advanced again it appeared that Talcott's horse was in the best condition of the three.

Reaching a point where the timber was dense and heavy, the trail or pathway through became narrow and crooked. Here, apparently by chance, Talcott led the way. His horse cantered easily along, threading the winding course and coming out into the rugged and boulder-strewn way well in advance of his companions.



Here he halted, as though with the intention of waiting for them to come with him. He could hear the steady thumping of their horses' feet, but two or three minutes, he calculated, would intervene before they would overtake him if he were to wait.

"I will risk it!" he muttered.

He put spurs to his horse, and the superb animal leaped like an arrow from the bow. There was a passage among the rocks which traversed a course almost spiral in its sinuous curves. There at the beginning of the rugged way there seemed to be perfect labyrinth of passages, some of them wide enough for a horse, some with a width scarce sufficient to admit the body of a man.

At the entrance of one of these narrower passages Talcott dismounted, and then struck his horse a sharp cut with a stick. The animal bounded away along the broader course, and even as it disappeared the rider turned into the narrower passage on foot.

He was none too soon.

The clatter of iron-shod hoofs rang on the rocks, and the James brothers dashed past the spot at a furious pace, and passed, of course, the point where Talcott and his horse separated.

The man of mystery did not wait to listen, for he knew that his horse and not himself would be followed by the outlaws. Indeed, he had practiced a ruse which would not have been looked for from a man not born and bred to a life among the wilds.

The passage which he was following was so narrow at some points that it was with difficulty, even, that he was able to thread its devious way. There were places where he had to squeeze himself through sideways, and at other points he had to clamber over boulders of considerable size, and which one would suppose actually blocked further passage.

At last he came to a place where the way again forked, and of the two passages he chose the one to the right.

This involved a steep ascent for a half-mile, then a twisted course of one-half that distance, and finally a plunge down what appeared to be a descent into the heart of the mountain.

Talcott moved with rapidity and confidence. He soon reached the bottom of the descent, and at that point it was naturally covered by a rock roof, forming a cave of small dimensions, but ample height.

The mouth of the cave being really open to the sky, the interior was not dark. It showed signs of having been occupied as a habitation. And Talcott wearily flung himself down on a wolfskin to rest.

As he reclined thus his eyes swept the interior of the cavern. Suddenly his wandering gaze became fixed; then he leaped up, a hoarse ejaculation bursting from his lips.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A STRUGGLE TO THE DEATH.

"Somebody has been here!" gasped Talcott.

He leaped like a hyena across the narrow cavern toward what appeared to be a sort of alcove in the rock, the interior of which was shrouded in darkness.

As he did so there was a movement from within the alcove and then a spurt of red light, accompanied by the thunderous report of a rifle.

Talcott staggered.

The bullet had branded his cheek.

Then he leaped into the opening, just as the form of a man attempted to spring out. And so the two grappled.

It was the clinch of death. There was the sound of sodden blows, of short-drawn breaths, like the sobs of men dying by violence, of a tearing like that of flesh by a wild animal, then the clash of steel against steel, showing that both combatants had succeeded in drawing knives.

The clinch of death—but not for both. It lasted but briefly, though to a watcher the period would have seemed terrible in its length.

Only for a few times did the steel clash against the same metal. Then there was a different sound, one which may never be mistaken for anything else in its sickening significance by one who has once heard it—the sound of a knife plunged into a human breast.

Then from out of the gloom of the natural alcove in the rocks one of the combatants sprang, and the bloody weapon was hurled spitefully out through the entrance of the cave.

Talcott was the victor.

Beyond the red brand from the bullet which had invited the battle, there was hardly a mark on him to show that there had been a struggle to the death.

But he was panting from the terrible exertion, and he flung himself down again on the skin to regain his breath and strength.

He was a man of wonderful vitality, and recuperation was rapid with him always. He was soon on his feet again, and then he dragged forth the body of the man he had killed—fairly in self-defense, it may be truthfully said.

The late adversary was a much older man than Talcott, but that he had been of more than ordinary hardihood in strength and experience his face and build proclaimed.

His face wore, even in death, a hard and merciless look. That his life had been one of desperate outlawry one might have seen by a mere look at him. And such, indeed, was the truth.

"No loss to the world," muttered Talcott, as he gazed meditatively into the countenance of the first man he had ever killed with his own hand.

"I did it to save my own life, and not to save the



money," he added, for a shudder had assailed his sensitive frame.

He stooped and went through the man's pockets.

He found there a small amount in money, and a larger one in washed gold in a pouch. On the pouch was a name—Wynn. On the haft of the dead man's knife were two initials—B. L.

"If the knife was his, then the pouch was not," decided Talcott.

"He was evidently a gold-camp sneaker. His face bears resemblance to a vulture. This will not be reckoned among my bad deeds when the final reckoning comes. Lucky there is a declivity out yonder where I may drop the body over, for there would be little chance of burying it here on the rocks. Now we will see if he had meddled with my own hoard."

Talcott dragged the body out of the cave, across a level space, up a steep ascent, and so to the brink of a declivity, over the edge of which he pushed the inanimate bulk.

Then he returned to the cave, and in the alcove lifted a heavy flat stone and groped in the opening underneath.

There he found a bulky roll of papers, and also a small iron-bound box. To the latter he fitted a key, raised the lid, and looked in on the neatly-packed mass of bank and government bills.

"Thirty-five thousand, besides the little fortune which I constantly carry in the belt around my body!" he exclaimed, while a light like that which may be seen in the eyes of a miser, leaped from his eyes.

"Sixty thousand more in that bundle of paper securities, if they could but be converted into cash," he added, as he touched the bundle in the cavity from which the box had been taken.

"I am a wealthy man, if I could but convey myself where the little fortune could be used. Yet here I am hiding like a gopher, startled by a glimpse of my own shadow, pledged to an outlaw brotherhood, with all the refinement and decency of life left behind me. And that was not all I left, either. I abandoned love!"

The last words were uttered scarce above a whisper, and, covering his face with his hands, his form shook with an emotion which he was for the moment unable to suppress.

But he soon calmed himself. Then he returned the box to its hiding-place, replaced the stone that covered it, scraped together some coarse gravel to hide the pool of blood which marked the spot where he had killed the outlaw stranger and then returned to the outer part of the cave again to rest.

As he did so he heard the click of a shod horse on the rocks outside.

"Can it be, so soon?" he exclaimed.

He sprang to the entrance, Winchester in hand. But he quickly lowered the weapon as the horse

which he had abandoned at the parting of the ways trotted up to him with a whinny of delight.

Talcott patted the animal on the neck and muttered words of welcome.

"You were sure to find your way back to me by the broader and longer route, my good Jay!" he exclaimed. "And I don't believe even Jesse James could keep track of you, for you travel light when I am not on your back, and there are too many marks on the rocks along the direct pass for him to easily detect where you left the main trail. But to guard against discovery we must return to them."

Talcott hastily partook of food, and then remounted.

By a direct route, which the horse would have remembered even if the man were confused, they returned to the main trail. They reached it but a short distance behind the James brothers, who had made several halts in a vain attempt to discover the way taken by Talcott after he had run away from them.

Besides, they were nearing the place where they would have to turn into a less traveled way toward their own rendezvous, which has been several times referred to, and Jesse James, especially, was anxious that Talcott should not give them the slip.

It would be hard to imagine two more astonished men than were the James brothers when Talcott coolly rode up with them, saying:

"I began to fear that I would miss you after all—that you would leave the main track for the one leading to your rendezvous before I could overtake you."

Jesse James pulled up, with his horse directly across the path, and there was an expression in his eyes as they met those of Talcott which indicated that he was not in a mood to be trifled with.

"Where have you been, Talcott?" was his direct demand.

"To my own quarters, where I have lived a hermit life for more than a year."

The answer was as direct as the question, and the keen instinct of the bandit leader told him that there was nothing about the mysterious absence of the stranger that the latter cared to conceal.

"Why did you run away from us in that fashion?"

"If I had asked permission you might have raised some objections and I wanted to make sure of it. Besides, I didn't agree to give up my personal liberty, did I?"

"That isn't the point, Talcott. I know nothing about you, and we just hung a man back at the edge of the timber because there was a possibility of his being a spy. We can't be too careful, and if you are the man that I took you to be—that is, with the kind of experience that I believed you have had—you know that men in our calling are liable to have eyes watching us, and guns aimed at our hearts, when we least suspect it. How far from here are your secret quarters?"



"Hardly more than three miles, in a straight line."

"How many have you with you?"

"Not one. But somebody had found his way into my cave and blazed away at me. It had to be a fight to the death. See the streak across my cheek?"

This Jesse James had noticed at first, and was on the point of inquiring about it.

"Who was the intruder?"

"I don't know. Here is what I found on him—perhaps you can identify him, or get a clew from the initials."

Talcott handed over the knife and pouch, as he found them on the person of the one who had hidden in his cave.

Jesse James examined the articles with interest.

"I don't recognize them. The man was probably a hanger-on of the mining camps, and had stolen the pouch. He may have been pursued, and so drifted into your retreat to hide. You say it was a fight to the death?"

"To his death."

"This is all you have to report?"

"It is the whole truth, excepting such details as relate to the affair which made me what you see me—a recluse and an outlaw."

"There's good gold in that pouch, and it probably came from the new camp. They say some have made rich strikes there, and I'm going to see if there is any foundation to the rumor. I, my brother and two or three others of my new brotherhood will go with me. All will go in disguise. I shall expect you to accompany us, Talcott."

"I don't like to do it."

"Afraid of seeing somebody that will know you?"

"You have hit the truth."

"Face it out. You can't stay in a burrow all your days. Are you wanted any worse than I? But I constantly take such risks, and I always come out of it. Bluff is the best game ever played for a winner. They'll track you to your hole in the end, and trap you there like a jack-rabbit."

"I'll face it out with you!" said Talcott.

And so their journey was resumed.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BANDED BROTHERHOOD.

The rendezvous chosen by Jesse and Frank James for the assembling of the select few who had agreed to join them in a new "brotherhood" for the prosecution of new exploits in a new country, was one which it would have been difficult to find without the guidance of some one who had before been over the road.

The feet of their horses were padded before the crooked way which led to their retreat was entered. Thus no trail was left behind that anything short of a bloodhound could follow.

A more wild and rugged spot it would have been hard to find.

In those mountains, in past ages, many water-courses were made and abandoned by the process of nature. Not many caverns, properly so called, were made in that locality; but there were short cañons and gorges, plugged up by the action of ice or subterranean upheavals, and in many cases the same processes closed a portion of one in at the top, forming what was practically a cavern, although it might not really be underground.

It was in such a place as this that the James boys had made the headquarters of the new brotherhood.

But little of the artificial had to be added.

They found five men there already; and not one of these had ever before figured as a member of the James boys gangs.

It will be necessary to mention but three of these by name, as the other two were to remain for a time at the rendezvous to welcome several others who were expected.

The three were known as Carl Becker, John Swanson, and "Jigger Jim," who was probably an escaped convict from California.

Swanson was a gigantic Swede, who had killed a brother-in-law in the East in a fit of jealousy, and fled to the Western wilds to escape justice.

Becker, known as "Dutchy," was a German, and began his career with a duel in which he had killed an officer in the army in his own land. Then he became a deserter, was chased through South America, and brought up on a ranch in Texas.

He soon got in with a gang of cattle thieves, became their leader, shot and killed several herdsmen and one of his own followers, who presumed to dispute his authority, and so had to retreat to pastures where fewer cattle of his sort had been to graze.

He was a desperate man, with the nature of a bulldog.

Jigger Jim was half-Indian and half-Mexican. He was a black little fellow, who seemed perfectly willing to die if it might only be with his boots on and his feet on *terra firma*.

He was handy with his guns, and when it came to the ugly dirk which he carried, he would have been equal to a whole crew of dagoes from sunny Italy.

Such was the makeup of the beginning of the James Boys' Brotherhood, which was to cut a unique and terrible figure in that wild section in the near future.

Singular and striking was the contrast between the ruffianly element just described and the stern, silent "man of mystery," Talcott, with his airs of the gentleman not wholly hidden by the desperate impulses and career into which he had been plunged.

Dutchy had already paid a brief visit to the new gold camp, and from him Jesse James obtained the first pointers of real value.



"Dere ish a goot eel off golt in dot camp, and dere ish plenty off shoot, eh?" he declared, his sullen face evincing no more emotion than that of a brass image.

"Plenty of gaming and drinking, too, it's likely?" suggested the bandit chief.

"Yas, but not so bad as you might t'ink. Dey ish crazy apoudt der golt, and dey not haf time to gamble or drink so much."

"Then most of the men are hoarding their gains?"

"Dot ish shoost it, Jesse James—dot ish shoost it. Dey ish making deir pile, and und den dey will light out for der place where dey come from pretty quig, ain't it?"

"Dutchy talk like he got too much 'backy in both his cheeks, eh?" grunted Jigger Jim, with an ill-natured shrug.

From the first the German and half-breed had not been on good terms.

Swanson grinned behind his yellowish-white beard.

"Too much teeth," he rumbled, in a voice that resembled a small earthquake. "I like to knock 'em out like this."

The Swedish giant emphasized this remark by clinching an enormous fist, a blow from which would have been death to a buffalo bull.

"And if he want fight, I give him this, eh?" said Jigger Jim, slyly showing his ugly dirk.

With Jesse James, however, Becker was a favorite, both on account of his natural intelligence and the impassive face and airs which he was able to maintain under the most trying conditions.

A discussion of the conditions at the new mining camp was carried on for some time.

Then the James boys took Talcott apart from the other members of the brotherhood.

The day was ended, and in the cavern rendezvous there was nothing to relieve the black gloom, save a few lanterns hung along the walls.

These cast weird shadows, and a fire burning at one end of the cavern room lent an uncanny effect to the whole scene.

The five members of the new brotherhood were engaged in the preparation of the evening meal.

Being beyond earshot of their companions, Jesse James said to Talcott:

"It has been the understanding between us that you were to join the outlaw brotherhood which I have been organizing. But a mere understanding isn't quite enough. There must be a pledge that will seem more binding."

"What does a pledge amount to?" demanded Talcott.

"It is supposed to have some force with a man of honor."

"A man of honor would keep straight without one. And a man without honor would break any pledge when it seemed to be for his interest to do it."

"You don't want to take one then, binding you to me as a loyal and faithful follower?"

"I will follow you loyally and faithfully as long as it seems to be for our mutual interest for me to do so. In no case would I consider that I had a right to betray you or any secrets that I might become possessed of while in your service, even if we were to separate. Isn't that enough?"

"Not quite. It is enough for you to say, but you must swear to it."

"I will do that."

A faint smile curled the lips of Talcott as he yielded the point.

It was evident that he thought Jesse James a stickler for the forms which had been always used by secret outlaw bands to bind the members together.

And yet, as Talcott well knew, all bandit leaders had been betrayed by some of the men who were most willing to take any oath of fellowship.

It was a matter, however, on which the experience of Jesse James went further yet.

While he knew that an oath would not hold a treacherous man true, yet he had found that a man who would refuse to take such an oath often proved to be a spy.

The oath was administered in a most solemn manner by the bandit king, and Frank James stood as a witness.

And in the midst of the ceremony Talcott was suddenly impressed by its solemnity and importance, precisely contrary to the impression he had had at first.

His face grew pale as it was concluded. Then he turned to his leader, extended his right hand and said:

"Jesse James, I never felt myself to be held by so strong a bond before. I feel, however, that it should be sealed by a stronger compact even than that just entered into."

Jesse took the hand, but his voice was cold as he asked:

"What bond can be stronger?"

"That of personal friendship."

"You want such a friendship with a man of my record?"

"Yes."

"It is many years, I suppose, since I could count on a single true friend."

"And don't you want another?"

"It is hard for me to believe that any man can give a disinterested wish for such a compact."

"Don't doubt me, Jesse James. I had many friends. For more than a year I have known the most terrible loneliness that a human being can feel and retain his senses. I want such a friend now, and the fact that you saved me from certain capture by that Sibley and his hounds twenty-four hours ago, combined with certain indications that you have



taken a personal liking to me, makes me wish you to say that we may, while we are together, be somewhat more than leader and follower in a bandit brotherhood."

The outlaw chief was silent for a moment. Frank watched his stern face curiously.

Then the hand of Jesse James closed suddenly on that of Talcott, the man of mystery.

"Friends let us be, then, till you give me the last proof that I can ever accept that there is no true friendship in the world," he said, his voice husky with an emotion which had not been manifested by him, probably, for many years.

At dawn Jesse and Frank James, accompanied by Talcott and three members of the banded brotherhood already described, started, securely disguised, for the new gold camp in the mountains.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### DOWN WITH RED ROGER!

The gold camp was in reality but little more than a camp, although it was fast becoming a populous one.

It was built up of the rudest of miners' shacks, with hardly a structure fit for the business which was gaining a foothold in the place.

If course there were two or three saloons, and one other resort for amusement, and during certain hours these places were well patronized.

In one of the saloons, at about ten o'clock in the morning, when all the steady-going men of the place were at their labor, a half-dozen idlers were drinking and playing poker, with a modest ante, in the leading saloon of the camp.

Just then a man sailed into the saloon, pulled a revolver and began shooting at the ears of the other inmates.

This playful individual had struck the town several days before, and as a marksman and a bully he was a success. He had a trick of getting the drop on anybody who might venture to object to his fun, and one of the boldest and best men in the camp had been shot dead by this same hilarious stranger.

He was known as Red Roger. He was red enough—hair, mustache of bristles and stubbly chin. His skin was red, and so were the whites of his eyes, like those of an ugly dog.

He was such a good shot that he could just scratch the ear of a man with a bullet and do the victim no more serious harm, provided said victim had the fortitude to let the bullets by without jerking his head.

But sudden movements had proven costly to several, for Red Roger had to guard against any attempt to get the drop on him in retaliation.

On this morning Red Roger was unusually playful.

He nipped ears of inmates of the saloon, including the man behind the bar, until he had emptied one revolver, and then pulled another with a move as if he meant to touch them all a second time.

He had started out to be a terror, and it looked as if he would succeed, unless somebody caught him in his sleep and got the drop that way. There were no many in the camp who would have cared even to try to do that, for fear that Red Roger might prove to be playing 'possum, and so plug them for their temerity.

But as he coolly drew the second gun, and the other inmates began to hold up their hands in token of having had enough of the play, another stranger crossed the threshold and stood with swift, alert glances at every face.

"Line up, gents!" growled Red Roger, and bang! went the freshly-drawn revolver.

That he included the newcomer among the "gents" who were to "line up" was evidenced by his swinging the gun around in his direction.

Crack! and the weapon dropped from the hand of Red Roger, and the hand that had been so carelessly scattering lead was swung aloft, and then down, with a finger lying bloody and crooked for the pull of a trigger on the floor beside the weapon.

At the same time Red Roger would have shown his gaminess by reaching for another gun, but the muzzle of the weapon which had called a halt to his fun was looking him in the eye—and it wasn't far off, either.

"None of that!" commanded the quiet, hard tones of the newcomer.

At the same time the stranger stepped forward, coolly took the third revolver from the belt of Red Roger, flung it on the bar, and said:

"Take the gun, bartender, as pledge for drinks for the crowd! Step up, gentlemen—Red Roger pays! Nothing small about Roger but his ears!"

A growl of astonishment rumbled through the room. Not a man stirred, out of sheer consternation at the audacity of the newcomer.

The latter was a much smaller man than the one whom he had so coolly disarmed, nor was he so fierce-looking. But there was something in his glance that seemed to hold those who met it with a magnetic power.

"Gentlemen," spoke the stranger, again. "You are invited to drink at the expense of this red rooster who, I take it, has done most of his drinking in this camp at your cost. His pockets are empty, so he pledges his last gun for the drinks. Set 'em up, bartender!"

The man behind the bar was the first to recover from the paralysis of astonishment. He "set them up" without loss of time.

Slowly the inmates of the place advanced to partake of the treat.

But the figure and face of Red Roger presented



the most grotesque picture of mingled bombast and humility that could be imagined. The bombast was an habitual expression, and the humility was manifested by the attitude and movements.

His big eyes bulged and his cheeks were puffed out, but his head drooped and his knees were crooked, as if the legs were getting too weak to hold up his body.

The other men in the saloon ranged themselves in front of the bar, and the bartender set out the drinks. "Here," said the newcomer, "there is one short. Red Roger himself seems to have been counted out of his own treat, and that won't do. Here, Rooster, waltz up after the poison!"

This was addressed to Red Roger. Not once had the stranger actually taken his eyes off the bully of the camp. Although the big man was disarmed, the one who had so coolly called him down from his perch was not of the sort to take any chances.

Yet, strangely enough, Red Roger seemed to have had all the fight taken out of him.

There had been something in the voice and face of the stranger which had a weakening effect on his nerve. It may have been that mysterious magnetism which a superior nature often concentrates to subdue the will of the inferior, quite as much as the fear of the revolver, which, all the while, did not descend far from a level with the face of Roger, that held the latter "non-resistant."

Another glass of liquor was set out for Roger. His right hand was bleeding, so it was his left that was reached out for the drink.

"Drink hearty, gentlemen," said the stranger. "And here's to the biggest bully and coward this side of the Sierras—Red Roger, the rooster that comes down from his perch!"

It was a queer toast, and there was a roar of laughter as it was drank. Red Roger gulped down his portion, and then waited for the next order.

"Take good care of the gun," said the stranger to the man behind the bar.

"Red Roger might want to redeem it," grinned the bartender.

"Yes, or need another drink that he couldn't pay for, and I take it that his credit isn't good, owing to his depending on bluff for keeping his pockets filled. Here, Roger, stand up straight, can't you?"

"Who—who in thunderation are you?" gasped the bully, as he straightened his tall form and met the cold, steady gaze of the man who had transformed him from a lord to a lackey.

"Do I look like anybody you ever saw before?"

"Yes, by thunder!"

"Do you want to name him?"

"You—you ain't——"

A spark seemed to shoot from the cold eyes of the stranger, and Red Roger dared not utter the name that trembled on his lips.

"I—I—maybe you ain't him, after all!" he mumbled apologetically.

Just then another man entered the place—and he, too, was a newcomer to the camp. Not one there had seen his face before, if we except the one who had broken the spirit of Red Roger.

But there need be no further hiding of his identity, so far as it has been thus far disclosed in this story.

It was Talcott, who, unless he were disguised when first encountered by the James brothers, was undisguised now.

He had, in fact, been standing just outside the door during the whole of the affair which has just been described. There was a faint smile of amusement on his face.

The subduer of Red Roger nodded in recognition as Talcott entered, and said:

"Do you care to come in on Red Roger's set-up, Mr. Talcott?"

"I think not. I'm afraid the gun there is hardly good for another glass," said Talcott.

"Roger, pick up the one on the floor that you dropped, and spout that, so this gentleman may enjoy your liberality with the rest of us. Then we'll all take another round with the rooster from the lowest perch."

Roger hesitated.

"Pick it up!" ordered the other.

It was done.

"Fling it on to the bar."

It went the way of the other, and the bartender, with a chuckle, scooped the revolver in as cash. He knew he was getting a good price for the drinks, for guns were salable things in the new gold camp.

Another round of drinks was taken at Red Roger's expense. Then the conquering stranger said, addressing the crowd:

"Do what you will with the bully-sneak. He is your meat, not mine!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE MINER'S TREASURE.

Having spoken these words to the inmates of the place the stranger turned as if he would go out, accompanied by Talcott. But before he reached the door he looked back at Red Roger.

He caught the latter in the act of bracing up, as if he would re-assert his supremacy. Their eyes met, and Roger began to slink again.

"Tie that fellow's dukes for him, and if he tries any monkey tricks don't hesitate to pump him full of lead," ordered the stranger.

Instantly three men leaped upon Red Roger, bore him to the ground, bound him hand and foot and then dragged him into a corner.

"We'll give him a short hearing," said one, who



had more than once submitted to a nipping of his ears under the sportive marksmanship of Red Roger, "and then decided whether to shoot or to hang the galoot."

This was a suggestion which became so instantly popular with the crowd who had just partaken of whisky at Red Roger's expense that it was with difficulty that they could be restrained from administering justice upon the culprit without even the "short hearing" that had been suggested.

Outside the saloon stood two horses. Not until these were mounted did Talcott or the stranger speak to each other.

"Rather a tame lot in there," said the stranger.

"And they didn't even guess that it was Jesse James who called down the boaster," replied Talcott.

"They didn't, but Red Roger got a close look into my eyes, and it isn't the first he has had."

"Then you know him?"

"He is a Missouri convict, and for a time he trained with one of my gangs on the Missouri border. But he was caught, and to get clear himself he gave away a plan for a railroad raid that I was working up. It isn't much wonder that he caved easy just now. He would let me twist him as if he was a string. But what do you think of the camp, Talcott?"

"I have been into only one other place, and that was nearly empty of men. They say this is a steady camp, with none but workers in it, and that if we want to see the crowd we'll find them washing dirt down in the gulch."

"Then the sooner we make our scoop and out of it, the better," said Jesse James, whose only disguise in reality consisted in a change of color of hair, beard and brows, and some changes of attire and tones.

There was, indeed, little likelihood of his meeting any one in that locality from whom he would have cause to fear recognition. For a character of the Red Roger type he cared nothing.

"Where are your brother and the other members of your band?" inquired Talcott.

"At the entrance of the gulch on guard."

"Where do you expect that the miners keep the treasure that they have accumulated?"

"It is likely that it is either in their shacks, almost entirely unprotected, or in the hands of some one of their number whom they have chosen as their banker."

"And do they trust to human nature to that extent out here?"

Jesse James smiled, in the peculiar mocking fashion which his hard life had made habitual with him.

"The kind of treachery that goes with the betrayal of confidence, making embezzlers and sneakthieves of that kidney isn't so plenty in this rough region as it is among your polite people of the Eastern cities. It is careless business, I reckon, to build a bank too close up against a meeting-house!"

Jesse James did not see the spasm of pain that flashed across the morose countenance of Talcott, the man of mystery.

Had he observed it, he might have suspected that he had sent a shot from his lips that struck more vitally to this man's heart than any from a revolver could have done.

They rode in silence along the entire length of the camp, and so few were the men in the place who were not toiling in the gulch that no one seemed to observe them as strangers.

If they were observed at all, it was probably thought that they were newcomers to the camp looking for a spot to pitch a tent or put up a shack.

Reaching the limit of the natural mountain "park," in which the camp was built, they were at the entrance to the gulch where rich placer mining had been struck.

There they saw a small cabin which was somewhat neater in appearance than the others. They halted at a little distance from the door.

Once, as they glanced toward it, Talcott thought he caught a glimpse of a woman, although he could not see her face. As the sex was rather thinly represented in the new camp he gave the matter more thought than he would otherwise have done.

"There is a woman in that cabin, unless I'm mistaken," he said.

"Likely enough. Petticoats follow the trail of gold, every time."

"There are not many here."

"They haven't had time to get here yet. But they would come in a flock, like buzzards to a feast, in a month or two."

"You haven't yet said how you propose to capture the camp?"

"I don't want to capture the camp. I want the gold, and nothing more. There are a half-dozen similar camps just opened up, all within a few weeks, time, and not far distant from one another. I want what they have for me. Then we move on in our campaign. There are plenty of fields to conquer, if we only have the right sort of men, and hang together."

"You know I told you that I would not take part in the indiscriminate slaughter of good men who are engaged in honest toil. I will shoot in self-defense, and to scare—that is all."

"That is about all I ever do, if the truth was known. I hold up a man, a town, or a railroad train. If no resistance is made, all hands come out of the scrimmage enjoying good health. If a man thinks more of his money than he does of his life, why, that is his lookout. As for the women, they generally scare and keep out of the way when the lead is whistling a tune!"

"Then your plan now is, to corral the miners, make them give up their dust, and light out?"



"Yes. But I must finish the prospecting first. Yonder is what we want."

A slender young fellow, apparently not older than sixteen, came out of the gulch and approached the cabin in which Talcott had obtained the glimpse of feminine apparel.

Jesse James rode up to him, doffed his hat in mock deference and smirked after a fashion which was little in harmony with his nature.

"Young feller," he drawled, "be you a citizen of this great and glorious golden gulch?"

The boy stared, and a faint flush mantled his handsome cheeks.

"What if I am?" he retorted.

"I am an 'umble seeker after inflammation!" drawled Jesse, who was as perfect an actor, when he chose to take a part the opposite of his natural character, as ever lived.

"What are you driving at? I'm in a hurry," snapped the other, who evidently had plenty of spirit, in spite of his youth.

"You bein' of a innercent countenance and bearin'," continued Jesse James, "I venture to ax ye for a sort of inflammation that I would otherwise be delikit about discussin'. To tell the truth, me and my pard here have been doin' a little prospectin' on our own accounts, down the gulch, in a spot that I ain't obleeged to speshify. We washed out some dirt, and likewise struck a pocket. As a consequence, we air toler'ble well heeled."

"Well, go ahead," the young fellow chipped in, as the outlaw paused to watch the effect of his speech.

"As a consequence, bein' of the sort that don't keer to blow in our proceeds at poker or fan-tan, we was thinkin' of depositin' it till we could git a chance to light out to a bigger town, if a sootible institootion or individual could be recommended hyerabouts for the purpose."

"You wished to deposit some gold dust and nuggets for safe-keeping, if I get at what you are driving at?"

"That's the simple truth, without any trimmin's."

"There is nothing of the kind here, unless a faro-bank would suit your purpose."

"I reckon that ain't the sort I was lookin' for. But if this camp is findin' any dust, it strikes me as queer that they don't have no way of disposin' of it in some sort of a cache."

"There is no bank," repeated the young fellow.

"And do they keep their bulge hitched on to their pusson as a sort of ballust, may I ax ye?"

"I never ask others what they do with their gold."

"Then it might be that ye could give us pards, which air strangers in these parts, a little of advice, as to whether or no it would be safe for us to put up a shack and keep our treasure merely kivered up with a bearskin, or some similar simple combination?"

"You can do as you like with your treasure, as I

would with mine if I had any," said the young fellow, with a sharp look from his keen eyes.

Then he recoiled with a gasp of horror.

He was looking into a tube of steel!

## CHAPTER X.

### Lias Ham.

A brief digression from the direct thread of this narrative becomes necessary at this point.

When Talcott adjusted the noose finally around the neck of Lias Ham, he was seized by a momentary weakness of purpose, combined with another impulse which looked to his own future safety.

Talcott had not a doubt but Ham was a spy or detective in disguise. He had no compunctions, to begin with, about allowing the man to be dealt with as the James boys saw fit.

But when he went up to adjust the noose, the man looked into his eyes with an appealing expression. Talcott's heart had not yet been hardened by betrayals and treachery, as had those of the outlaw brothers, and he found it hard to let the final responsibility for the death of the man to rest on his soul.

At the same time it occurred to him that Ham might not be a spy, after all, but merely a victim of unjust suspicion.

Then, in a rapid flash of reasoning, Talcott thought that if he were then to give the man a chance for his life, Ham would at least stand ready afterward to repay the kindness in kind.

So, just as they were startled by the sounds of rifle shots further on in the timber, Talcott made a hasty knot inside the loop of the noose, to keep the latter from drawing tight around the man's throat.

It was an act which merely gave Lias Ham a chance, although it was by no means certain to save him from strangulation.

But it was all he could do, and he was not sure, even, that Ham was aware of the action, although he found time to whisper to the supposed spy:

"You can kick clear of this if you are careful!"

Lias Ham heard and understood. He found that the noose did not tighten around his throat, and he knew that Talcott had given him the chance.

"I didn't think he loved me well enough for that!" he muttered, as the outlaws rode rapidly away.

Even before the sound of hoofbeats had died away in the distance, Ham strained at his bonds, found that they were by no means secure, and quickly got his hands free.

Frank James, having left the choice of being bound in part to Ham himself, had tied him hastily, and without special care. It was the knot around the neck that he depended on to keep Lias Ham from making further trouble in the world.

With his hands loose, Ham easily got the noose



off, and then stood on *terra firma* once more, none the worse for his close call, except that the scare had been a severe test to his heart.

That pounded his ribs as if it wanted to get out.

The words muttered by Ham as the outlaws left him had none of the down East twang in them. But the next time he spoke it was in the same manner which he had used before the hanging episode.

Perhaps the rope around his neck improved his speech while it was there.

"Wall, I'll be darned if I like that kind of a necktie," he observed, as he tossed the rope aside and rubbed his hairy throat where it left a red streak.

"For that marter," he continued, "the Hams never was addicted to wearin' dickies and scarves round their necks, owin' to there havin' been a case of diphthery in one of their ancesters, as I've been told."

These words were hardly out of his lips before he heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and he made a leap of about five feet into the air, and then started to run like a hound.

At the same time he cast a hurried backward glance, to make sure whether or not it was one of the outlaws returning to find if the hanging were successful.

To his intense relief he saw the miner who had been left at the edge of the timber—the same who had been wounded, and his life spared on the petition of Talcott.

Ham ambled back and gave the miner almost as much of a scare as he had himself received.

"Wall, we're on airth, as it were, after comin' pesky nigh to goin' out on't," said Lias.

"Then they tried to murder you—the devils!" exclaimed the miner.

"They tried, but didn't make out, owin' to my neck bein' so long and slim that the noose wouldn't choke me to death."

"I didn't know but the gentleman member of the band—the one they called Talcott—helped you out."

Here was a good chance for Ham to speak a good word for the man of mystery, but he did not do so.

"He had a good chance to do it, but mebbe he 'druther see me hang," said Lias.

"I heard two or three shots just now from this direction, and I was in hopes that the outlaws had got into trouble. I wonder if they are coming back this way?"

"I guess they ain't likely to for a spell, anyhow. And I take it that yeou ain't partickler about seein' of 'em."

"Jesse James would shoot me on sight, and I don't much care if he gets the chance, for he has taken the start for a fortune which I had pulled together, and the first I ever had in my life."

"Wade in and git another."

"And lose it again. It is my luck—it has always run that way, and I have lost courage."

"What's the marter with yeou and me strikin' up a partnership and goin' to the new diggin's together? There's the hosses that was rid by the men that was with you back a piece, and we can ketch one apiece and be fixed for a mount. And we have l'arned a thing or tew about takin' keer of ourselves, I guess, hain't we?"

This proposition seemed to strike the miner favorably, and it was acted on without delay.

The miner sought a place of concealment near at hand and waited for Ham to go back after the horses, which he agreed to do on account of the wound from which the other was suffering.

He did not have long to wait. That was not all.

Ham provided himself with weapons from the bodies of the dead miners in the valley, and brought enough to supply the miner at the same time.

Then they proceeded on their way toward the mining camp in the mountains.

Ham displayed a skill in detecting trails that did not tally with his character as a down-east Yankee, and there was evidently some reason besides a wish to engage in placer mining behind his anxiety to get to the diggings.

They avoided the direct trail, and within a few hours came to a halt within less than a half-hour's ride of the gold camp.

Here the manner of Lias Ham abruptly changed, although he was too cautious to depart from the assumed dialect, for fear that there might be some one to overhear.

"Bridge," he said to the miner—that being his name. "Jesse James, that Talcott and several other darned skunks of the same litter air goin' for to try and clean out the camp of gold-hunters. Yeou know that?"

"There's no doubt of it."

"They ain't a gre't ways ahead of us, and I'm for strikin' into the gulch lower down, instid of goin' straight to the camp, and so givin' the miners warnin'. That's one thing that's fetchin' me this way, when it would seem to be a pesky sight healthier to go somewheres else."

"I'll stand by you in anything to get the better of those fiends, the James boys and their followers. But do you really believe Talcott will help them in their murderous work?"

"He may keep his hands clean of the murderous part of it, but when it comes to sharin' the proceeds, let me tell yeou that Talcott, as he calls himself, has the sort of fingers that stick to gold and sich extrys, like measels to a nigger baby."

"Then you know him?"

"Wall, not jest the same as I know my favorite a'nt. But I guess I know suthin' about him. And, say, yeou ain't 'tall likely to mention anything to Talcott of what I say to yeou?"

"I think not."



"Wall, I don't make no bones of sayin' that I 'druther ketch that cuss than Jesse James, on some accounts, speshily."

"How is that?"

"Because Talcott is my partickler game."

"And you are a detective!"

"Shet up, darn ye!"

Bang—from behind a bowlder.

A bullet zipped so close to the cheek of Lias Ham that the latter could feel the "wind" as it passed.

He did not wait for the hidden marksman to make a second trial.

His long legs took him over the intervening space quicker than he could count, and in a second he was clutching and being clutched by one of the members of Jesse James' banded brotherhood who had been left behind to guard the rendezvous and trail.

He was, in fact, one who was not at the rendezvous when the James boys and Talcott arrived and departed from the mountain cave.

He was a powerful man, and when Ham pounced upon him he was in the act of pulling a revolver to fire at close quarters. But he was too slow, for Ham proved then to have a quickness of movement which was marvelous.

The revolver was dropped on the rocks, and was discharged as it fell.

Then there was some warm work for a brief space of time and of a sort that proved Lias Ham to be a man of marvelous muscular power, and considerable skill as well.

The combatants rolled over and over on the rocks, and Ham got hold of a knife before the other had a chance to do so.

That simplified matters for the pretended down-easter, and within another sixty seconds the battle was ended.

The outlaw, desperate man though he was, had died in the service of the Banded Brotherhood, and away from his leader—a fact which Jesse James was not to discover until several days later.

"He's got his quietus," said Ham, breathing hard as he faced the miner, who had started to take a hand in the fight in case of need.

"You are a tremendous fighter."

"It was one of them situations when there was tremendous need of somebody doing some fighting," said the other.

Ham leaned against the rocks for a brief space to recover his wind. Then he said:

"There is no time for us to waste—not even for me to put into down-east lingo. Now I guess I know the meaning of the shots that started Jesse James off in such a hurry when they were getting up the necktie party on my account."

"What was it?"

"They've got two or three men posted along the route to the mining camp, and the shots were signals

from one to the other. It told the James boys that there might be danger along the way, and at the same time there was a chance that they had been seen by some strolling men from the camp along the way. Anyhow, they seemed to be mighty particular to get off the main route in as much of a hurry as they could."

The truth about the mysterious firing heard by the James boys was by this only explained in part.

There had in reality been a meeting between the outlaw whom Lias Ham had just overcome and a prospector, in which there was an exchange of shots, with the result that the latter was killed.

In truth, Jesse James and his brotherhood was strewing the mountain trail with the dead of honest toilers.

What, then, was to be the fate of the Banded Brotherhood?

More than one bitter encounter must ensue before the question was to be decided.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE RECOGNITION.

Back to the entrance of the mountain miners' gulch.

There were Jesse James, with leveled revolver, facing the slender, resolute young fellow who had given such unsatisfactory answers to his questions.

Talcott, becoming more and more accustomed to the bitter strife of the outlaw career, looked on apparently unmoved.

Yet, as he got a better view of the young fellow's face, he might have been seen to give a slight start, as though he had seen a face that resembled it at some time in the past.

"Boy," said Jesse James, in a tone such as the other had never heard before, "you are young to die, but not too young unless you can open your lips more civilly. No more fooling, mind you! Answer this: what do the miners of this camp do with their gold when they have washed it out of the sands down in the gulch?"

"How can I know how they all dispose of it?"

"You do know, and you will tell me before you have drawn four more breaths, or you shall bid good-by to the world! Out with it, curse you for a white-livered tenderfoot!"

The voice and the face of the bandit king were terrible then, and the boy, with all his courage, broke down.

He covered his face, the tears streamed from his eyes, and he sobbed with a sudden weakness that could not be braced up.

"Spare me!" he pleaded.

"No. Tell me what I ask."

"But it is betraying their trust in me if I do that!"



"What care I?"

The boy again looked the bandit in the face.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am Jesse James!"

"God help us, then! Oh, my sister! Sir——" with a look of appeal to Talcott. "You will speak a word in our behalf, even if you are a member of the James boys' gang!"

Talcott shook his head.

Jesse James looked at him with a peculiar squint, as though he were trying to detect either treachery or weakness.

But he saw sign of neither.

"Jesse James, the miners have intrusted the gold which they have accumulated to the safe-keeping of my sister and myself. Only one or two of them all look out for their own, and that is because they prefer to gamble or drink it away."

"You and your sister are the bankers of the mining camp, then?"

"Yes. And we are least able to make a defense. They trusted us. They did not think there would be any one in the world low or cruel enough to take advantage of our weakness."

"A good scheme."

"Then you will spare us?"

"I'll spare your lives, yes!"

"There—even you, Jesse James, have been spoken of as more merciless than you really are. You shall from this hour be followed by the prayers of my grateful sister, and my own!"

The boy would have grasped one of the bandit's hands.

But Jesse James drew back, and the smile that curled his lips was not good to see.

"Wait!" he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I said I would spare your lives. But that is conditional. I didn't say I should go off and let you keep a grip on that gold! Not a bit of it. That would be a good way to start people to hiring innocent-looking boys and pretty sisters to take care of their treasure for them, for it would be safer than the strongest deposit vaults ever invented. Come, we musn't stop to dally about this matter. Where is the gold?"

The boy seemed about to swoon and fall at the feet of the bandit king.

Talcott seized his arm, got out a flask and dashed a few drops of the contents betwixt the lips of the boy.

The latter instantly revived. At the same time Talcott spoke:

"We are after gold, not lives, my boy. If you value life at less than your gold, that isn't our fault!"

"That's the right word!" exclaimed Jesse James.

A wild cry—almost a scream—broke from the lips of the boy.

It rang through the mountain "park" from end to

end. It sounded far down into the lonely gulch where the miners were at work.

It awoke echoes that had never been heard before.

In the miner's cabin at the entrance of the gulch, only a few steps from where the leader and follower of the Banded Brotherhood were standing, another was aroused to a knowledge that a terrible danger was near.

That one was the sister of the boy—and in that cabin was the treasure of the miners in the gulch.

She ran to the door, saw her brother menaced by the revolver in the hand of the fierce-eyed chief of bandits. She saw that another man was supporting him with a hand under his arm.

With a Winchester in hand she sprang out through the doorway.

Up went the Winchester, and the heart of Jesse James was covered.

In that second two lives hung by less than the weight of a hair.

They were the lives of Jesse James and the brother of the beautiful girl who threatened him.

Had her bullet sped to its mark, his would have first pierced the brain of the boy before him.

Whether or not she would have thought of this likelihood and so restrained her impulse to use the power in her hands, cannot be known.

At that instant Talcott turned so as to see her.

He had a perfect and full view of her face and graceful outlines.

For a second he stared, while his countenance became of the hue of death.

Then he flung out his hands, uttered a hoarse, inarticulate cry, and, wheeling, fled into the gulch, as if he were pursued by a score of fiends.

His outcry, his strange behavior, perhaps something remembered about his form and gesture, for his face was too much disguised for ready recognition, caused her to drop her Winchester, while she trembled with a sudden agitation that she could not overcome.

Jesse James saw it all, and he was as much astounded as any one could have been. But it was not like him to be forsaken by his presence of mind.

He let one hand clutch the collar of the boy, and he drew the latter toward the cabin door.

"This is getting to be quite a play," said the bandit king. "But we can't stop to have all the parts explained as we go along. My partner seemed to have something like a fit; but I'm not subject to such attacks. Come, we'll ask that pretty sister of yours to give up the treasure. And it will be for her health as well as yours to do it in a hurry. It would be easy for me to shoot you, tie up the little sister, and take the gold without any more teasing. So you see I'm merely giving you a chance to take a pleasanter way of making the transaction."

The boy was silent.



In another moment they were face to face with the sister.

The latter stooped to pick up her rifle.

"It is no use, Isabel," said her brother.

"What is the meaning of it all?" she asked.

Jesse James doffed his hat, even though he did not for an instant relinquish his alertness.

"Your brother speaks truly, Isabel," he said, with his cruel smile. "It is no use. I am after the gold belonging to the miners in the gulch. I mean you no harm. I do not even wish to spill any lead among the good men who are at work. Mr. Talcott, my new partner, is a humane man, and he asks me to run my trade with less bloodshed. I'm willing to try his scheme. If it don't work, then I'll go back to the old way. Come, miss, where is it? Gold is heavy plunder, and you had better have the brother help to haul out the stuff while I wait. Ah!—yonder comes one of my men. He will help about the heavy work!"

The one approaching was Jigger Jim.

Isabel Carleton was a resolute girl.

She was about twenty-six, and there had been that in her life to strengthen a naturally strong nature.

At the same time she had the good sense to understand that she could do nothing to defend the treasure intrusted to her protection.

Her brother bent and whispered the name of the outlaw king in her ear.

"Jesse James!" she repeated aloud.

"At your service, Isabel!" smiled the bandit.

"And you prey on boys and women! Why, I have heard that you are a brave man, even if a misguided one!"

"Indeed! How rumor does lie about me!" retorted the bandit.

"If I were to refuse to get you the gold?"

"I have told your brother what I would do. And it may be, among other things, that you have heard about the wicked Jesse James is some story about his always doing the thing that he swears he will do."

"Yes, I have heard that."

"Then get me the gold."

## CHAPTER XII.

### CONCLUSION.

While the treasure of the gulch miners was being hauled out from its hiding-place in the cabin of Isabel Carleton, that wild, appealing scream from her brother had not been without its effect down in the gloomy depths of the gulch.

One of the miners at the upper end of the gulch heard it plainest, and there was that note of appeal and terror in it that told the hearer of the dire need of help.

The man ran down the gulch until he found a partner.

The latter had likewise heard the cry, but not so plainly.

So was the alarm passed along from one to another as rapidly as couriers could carry it with short distances between.

At the same time, Jigger Jim, Dutchy and Swanson, the giant Swede, of the Banded Brotherhood, heard the cry from Isabel's brother, and at the time they were posted along the gulch at such distances as to be able to give the alarm if the miners should start on a return to the camp.

So it happened that when the miners started back up the gulch to ascertain what was the matter at the camp, they were met by a sudden blaze of fire from Swanson and Dutchy. Jigger Jim, meanwhile, had gone back at a run, and arrived at the cabin, as we have seen.

In firing on the miners, Swanson was too hasty, and really disobeyed the instructions of Jesse James. Dutchy had to back him up, although he would rather not have fired at that stage of the affair.

Both then mounted their horses, which they had left a little way behind, and dashed at a furious pace up the gulch.

They were met by Frank James, while they heard a popping of weapons from the miners a good distance in their rear.

"What is the shooting for?" demanded Frank, pulling his horse up so as to bring them to a halt.

"Dot blame fool cuss, he shust let dem bullet go fore he tink!" growled Dutchy, with a savage glance at Swanson.

"The miner come up the gulch, be here pretty quick. Dutchy let 'em come—what he care?" thundered the Swedish giant, with his usual ill-nature toward the German.

"Well, we make our stand here. They musn't get out of the gulch till the scoop is made at the camp," was the stern order of Frank James.

"You haf to holt dot fool cuss, or he run up der side der rock, ain'd it!" muttered Dutchy.

Swanson rumbled something back, but the words could not be distinguished.

There was no more time for them to bicker, for at that moment the foremost of the miners came in sight.

"Drop him, and then we will call a halt to the others," was the quiet order of Frank James.

It was Swanson's Winchester that did the work. It had barely sent its message when Talcott was seen to approach, his face white as a sheet, while he breathed as if each breath might have been his last.

"For God's sake, don't kill those men!" he gasped. Frank turned on him with a suspicious stare.

"And why not?" he demanded.

"She is up yonder—Isabel Carleton!"

"So! But what of that? Is she anything to us?"

"She is—or was—everything to me!"



"That's pretty!" sneered Frank James. "If she is everything to you, why not go up and defend her? You won't have anybody worse than my brother to beat in the scrimmage, and maybe you'll come out of it!"

Talcott realized then that he had been speaking words which must have sounded like those of an insane man.

He leaned against the rocks for a moment, then approached Frank James, in a calmer mood.

He had once more obtained control over his feelings, and the bitter expression returned to his countenance.

"I was beside myself!" he exclaimed. "Don't mind what I was saying. Were you going to make a stand here against the miners?"

"Yes, we are to hold them here till Jess signals for us to vamose."

"All right! I stand with you. But Jesse said there was to be as little killing as could be managed without."

"There will be no killing if they keep back out of range, and a lot of it if they try to get too close. They are ten to one against us, and so would have no show at all if they once got the drop on us. Ha!—there they come!"

From around an angle of the rocks appeared a half score of the gulch miners. Only a few of them were armed with anything more than knives or pistols, and as they saw that they were confronted by Winchester, they fell back in confusion.

As has been stated, nearly all were Eastern men, and they were in poor training to meet a crew like that of which the James boys Banded Brotherhood was composed, few in numbers though they were.

Meanwhile, there was another element against the James boys of which they had no suspicion at the time.

Lias Ham, the disguised detective who was in pursuit of Talcott, with the miner who accompanied him, at that moment came up the gulch at a furious pace and fell in with the miners who were huddled below the angle.

He swung one long leg over the back of his horse, cast a glance about on the faces of the men, several of whom had him "covered."

"Don't waste lead on me," he said. "You have just been attacked by the James boys, I take it."

"The James boys?" they echoed in the same breath.

"Yes, with a new gang of select devils that they have been getting together. They have one in the crowd—one they call Talcott—and I want him. I'm willing to work any kind of a bluff that will put him in my power."

Lias Ham advanced cautiously to the bend in the gulch and peered beyond it at the outlaws who were on guard.

Bang!—and the bullet flattened against the rock that shielded him, at a spot where his face had been for a single brief instant.

But the glimpse he got showed him Talcott standing at the side of Frank James.

"I must have that man!" was his resolution.

He set about carrying it into execution.

He learned that by making a short detour there was a way by which one might get into the gulch at a point just above where the outlaw guards were posted.

The way was steep and dangerous, but Ham—which was in reality the detective's name—counted no cost that should favor the design which he had traveled so far and run so many risks to bring about.

In ten minutes he was overlooking the gulch, and so near to Talcott that he might almost have reached down and touched him with his Winchester.

At that moment there came a signal from the upper end of the gulch.

"It is the recall from Jesse!" announced Frank in a low tone. "Now we are to ride up to the camp, and with the boodle which he has by this time got secure, make a rush away from the camp by the way of the opposite entrance. Now, to hold back pursuit, give a volley at the rocks, making the lead patter as close as you can to the men beyond the bend. And as we retreat, keep the lead pushing them back, bang-ity-bang!"

All mounted, for Talcott's horse had followed him as he ran down the gulch.

Then the volley was fired—then spurs were given to the horses—and up the gulch they flew.

It was then that Lias Ham, with an oath, jumped down from his perch and let fly a shot after Talcott.

The horse was hit, and went lame, falling quickly to the rear.

The others of the Banded Brotherhood dashed ahead.

Talcott wheeled in his saddle and fired without fairly giving the man behind him a look.

The shot did not take effect.

The horse stumbled, and Talcott flung himself from the saddle, a sense of bitter regret for the loss of his noble horse surging up within him.

Then he found himself face to face with Lias Ham.

The latter leaped upon him like a tiger.

"Talcott—*alias* Herman Averill, forger and defaulter from Connecticut—you are my prisoner!"

Such were the words of Lias Ham, the detective.

"Ah!—your prisoner, am I? You, whose life I saved from the noose only a few hours ago!" uttered Talcott—as we may continue to call the man of mystery—even now that the brief speech of the detective has solved that mystery.

Then the men met, a revolver blazing at short range in the hand of each. Neither was much hurt by the discharge.



The struggle became a fierce one of another sort.

They were but a short distance from the entrance to the gulch.

Talcott was desperate, but it soon became clear that he was no match for his assailant.

He would soon have been overpowered, and the thought that, after more than a year of flight and hiding from justice, he might at last be taken back and tried for his crimes—he made again to face the family and friends whom he had brought to shame—was more than the proud-spirited man could bear.

He had a knife, and finding that he could not make the blade find the life-springs of his adversary, he would have turned it against himself.

But at that juncture a horseman came dashing down the gulch at a furious pace.

It was Jesse James.

At a glance he saw how the battle stood between Talcott and the detective.

He pulled up his horse, took a quick but accurate aim with his Winchester, and fired.

Talcott felt a hot flood gush out on to his arm, and the form of Lias Ham dropped in a lifeless heap at his feet.

A second later the bandit king had Talcott by the arm and was half lifting him to the back of his own horse.

"Quick, man!" said Jesse James. "We have got to make a break for it now, or whip the whole crew of gulch miners in a fight."

Up the narrow way they sped, soon coming out where their comrades awaited them.

As they passed the cabin of Isabel Carleton, Talcott held his face so that no glimpse of it could be obtained by her, if she were on the lookout.

At the other end of the camp another horse was procured for Talcott, and they were soon well on their way from the miners' camp.

The amount in gold obtained was quite large, but not quite up to the expectations of Jesse James.

But as there were other similar camps in the vicinity which he intended to visit with his new crew of men—the Banded Brotherhood—it promised to be his most successful season, in its way.

As they rode away from the camp, Talcott revealed to Jesse James the secret of his life.

All that has not been disclosed already in the latter part of this narrative, is the fact that Isabel Carleton was his betrothed wife at the time he had fled from

his native New England town a defaulter and embezzler to the amount of one hundred thousand dollars.

The story of his flight and the struggle of life and conscience, through which he sank to the level of a common outlaw, is one which cannot be told here.

But it may be said that his career as a member of the Banded Brotherhood of the James boys was not ended.

At the end of the raid on the gulch miners, Talcott returned to his own retreat, and found his stolen treasure still safe.

Jesse James did not ask him how much he had, nor did he require him to share with the other members of the gang.

The king of bandits seemed to have taken a strange liking to the bitter, morose "man of mystery."

For that reason, and probably no other, he favored Talcott in many ways.

The miners in the gulch organized a pursuit of the outlaws as soon as possible, and a powerful party undertook to run to earth the small but select Banded Brotherhood.

It was a vain attempt, and there was not even an encounter between them at the time. Indeed, Jesse James did not have men enough to put up a fight against a strong party, and he was too prudent to attempt it.

The Brotherhood, however, was to become stronger, a great struggle was ahead of them.

"Talcott," said Jesse James, when they were safe in their rendezvous, and no one else was near to hear his words, "I can't make it out; but, somehow, you have a hold on me different from that of other men. Perhaps there is a streak in you as ugly as that in me."

"Perhaps," echoed Talcott.

Then he thought of Isabel Carleton, and he wondered if she had not come out to that wild region in quest of him.

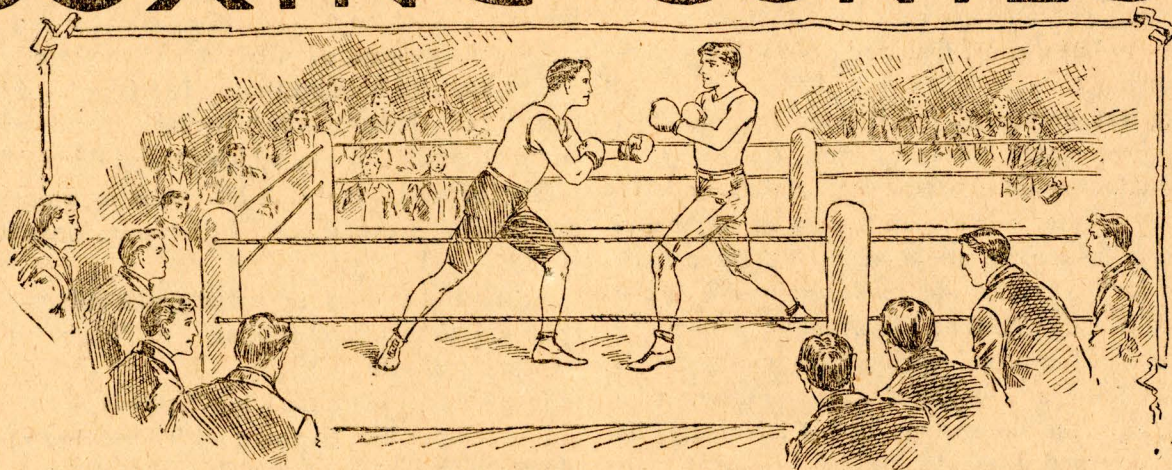
Had he been where he could have heard the murmured prayers of the beautiful inmate of the cabin at the entrance to the gulch that night, his question would have been answered.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 46) will contain "Jesse James' Railroad; or, The Outlaw Brotherhood at Bay," a dandy story, boys. Look out for it.



# BOXING CONTEST



Still they come, boys! More letters! This contest has started in a-humming. Every one of you knows how to box. Your stories show that. Keep it up. There's a chance for everybody. It looks as if we were going to succeed in what we set out to do—to make this the biggest contest yet. Look over on page 30 if you don't know all about the contest and the prizes we offer already.

## Three Lively Rounds.

(By Frank Ford, Mass.)

The referee called the men to the center of the ring. They were introduced, and they squared off for action.

### ROUND 1.

They tapped each other lightly. A. led right for the jaw, but fell short. B. threw his right to the head and left to the body. A. led left twice to the body. They got into close quarters and mixed it up, sending half-arm jolts to the head and body. When the round closed they were sparring.

### ROUND 2.

A. sent right to the head. B. led right to the body. B. threw a hard left to the jaw and right to the head, and A. went down. He got up on the count of six. He was groggy and B. sent left to the jaw and right to the wind. A. tried to defend himself, but was too weak. A. went down with a right swing to the nose and was saved by the gong.

### ROUND 3.

Both men came up fresh. B. put it all over A. for a few seconds. Then A. sent a hard right to the mouth and drew first blood. B. forced A. to the ropes and sent hard rights and lefts to the body and head and then sent a hard right to the point of the jaw.

A. fell, but was up in five seconds, only to go down and out with a hard left to the solar plexus. He was counted out and the referee declared B. the winner.

## A Tough Fight.

(By F. Jerger, Ohio.)

At about half-past three one afternoon, Elwood Rutter brought his boxing gloves out in the yard where we were sitting. Elwood's brother, Lude, and Charles Brown

were pretty good boxers, so we decided to have a boxing contest.

They both agreed to go it five rounds. We formed a ring and Lude and Charles stepped into the ring.

Charles began side-stepping and succeeded in giving Lude a right-hander on the jaw. After this onset Lude was more careful. He feinted with his left, and Charles, throwing up his hands to ward off the blow, received a stunning blow on the chin, which sent him reeling into his own corner. This ended the first round, which was of course, in Lude's favor.

After they had both taken a slight rest, they again marched to the center of the ring. In this round the fighting was hot and fast. They were soon in a mix-up, and the referee had to interfere and separate them.

Lude feinted with his right, and followed this up with a left jab at Charles' face.

Charles cleverly ducked, and in return planted his right on Lude's chest, bringing him to the floor.

The referee started to count him out when the bell rang, showing that the round was up. This was a fortunate thing for Lude, for he did not get up for quite a while afterward. This round was in Charles' favor.

The honors were now even. Two rounds had now been fought, and it was a puzzle who would win. After a short rest they again stepped into the ring.

Lude is a little nervous as he enters the ring. They both side-step, and Charles rushes at Lude, who sends him back again with a terrible blow on the nose, which brings blood. He then tries to follow this up by rushing at Charles, who he thought was off his guard; but he is mistaken.

Charles suddenly stepped to one side and let Lude rush past him. Then with a step as quick as that of a cat he planted his right behind Lude's ear.

Lude rolled over and over and then lay still. The referee then counted him out amid the cheers of all the fellows. Charles was the hero of the day.



**Knocked Out in the Seventh.**

(By Henry Hofmeister, Ind.)

"Going to see the fight, Jim?"

"What fight, George?"

"Oh! Then you didn't hear that 'Kid' Stevens and Harry Campbell are going to fight at Williams' barn to-night."

"The dickens you say! Why, Campbell will get all he is looking for. Stevens is at least twenty pounds heavier than he is."

"I haven't anything to do with that, and, say, Jimmy, I am going to fight 'Mike' Louis in one of the preliminaries."

"Oh, you'll lick him sure. Good-by, George," said Jimmy Loyd, as they separated.

"Good-by, Jimmie," replied George Marshall.

Williams' barn was on the outskirts of Baltimore. When the time for the fight arrived, the barn was packed with excited men and boys.

As Jimmy Loyd predicted, George Marshall defeated "Mike" Louis, knocking him out in the sixth round.

The main event, between "Kid" Stevens and Harry Campbell, was to be a ten-round affair.

Suitable officials were chosen, and the referee called both boys together and spoke to them for a few moments.

Both boys looked at each other critically.

"Kid" Stevens weighed 128 pounds, while Harry Campbell tipped the scales at 114 pounds.

The bell rang, and both boys commenced to circle around each other.

Stevens led for the head. Campbell sprang away, Stevens followed him and landed a heavy body punch. Campbell came back with a stinger on the jaw. Stevens landed three stingers on the body in quick succession, and then smashed Campbell one on the jaw. Stevens rushed Campbell to the ropes and was putting it all over him when the bell rang.

Stevens had the better of the second round. Campbell was groggy when he returned to his corner.

Stevens rushed Campbell and landed on the jaw, Campbell smashed Stevens one between the eyes. Stevens caught Campbell a hot one on the jaw. Campbell staggered, and then Stevens floored him with another one on the jaw. The crowd roared. Campbell staggered to his feet and Stevens came back at him with a staggerer over the heart. Campbell fell, but the bell saved him from a knockout.

Rounds four and five were both Stevens', Campbell being floored three times, but each time he got up and gamely continued to fight.

Campbell did better work in the sixth round. He brought the crowd to their feet by flooring Stevens with a right hook on the jaw.

Round Seven.—Stevens rushed and swung for the head. Campbell ducked and put one to the jaw. Stevens floored Campbell with a solar plexus blow.

Campbell got up and closed Stevens' right eye. Stevens, mad with fury, rushed Campbell to the ropes,

Campbell whipped a hot one to the kidneys and followed it up with a staggerer on the jaw. Stevens rushed again. Campbell sent a crashing blow to the jaw. Stevens wobbled.

Campbell, seeing his advantage, rushed in and after a rapid exchange of blows, sent a terrific blow to the jaw. Stevens reeled and whirled around and fell with a thud.

The crowd roared as the referee counted Stevens out. Half an hour later Williams' barn was deserted.

**Rothschild vs. Black.**

(By Harry Crandall, N. Y.)

I will tell you of a fight between two boys by the names of Milton Rothschild and Eugene Black. It was to have been a five-round go, but did not go the limit.

First Round.—Milton led for the face. Eugene side-stepped and landed right to wind. They both sparred. Milton made a feint with left and landed right to head. Eugene ducks a left swing and uppercuts to jaw, both sparring at end of round.

Second Round.—Eugene forces fighting. Milton blocks a terrific right and lands a left to Eugene's ear. Eugene is dazed by the blow, and Milton lands a right to ribs. They both spar. Eugene very groggy at the end of round.

Third Round.—Milton rushes Eugene and lands a beauty right on Eugene's nose, which draws the blood. Eugene tries to counter to ribs, but it is blocked, and Milton feints with left and just for a minute Eugene leaves his stomach unguarded, and Milton hits him a fearful swing, which doubles him up.

Eugene is too weak to continue, and we awarded the fight to Milton.

**A Tough Match.**

(By Arthur Rehn, Illinois.)

It happened one Saturday afternoon that in a neighbor's yard we were busily practicing the art of boxing. Other boys soon came around and wished to try it. They were given turns, until at last two larger boys stepped up. Their hands had evidently felt the gloves before.

They stood eying each other, looking for some point to plant their first strike.

The first blows were aimed for the eyes, the hit was avoided, and an uppercut came in return, causing the other boy's tongue to bleed. This laid him out for a few moments.

Then he tried to restore his authority.

The hit was quickly dispatched by a left punch in the ribs. Then the blows flew thick and fast, until after a few minutes one boy received a blow in the chest. This deprived him of his wind, laid him out and proved his assailant to be the better man.



# TALES OF HUNTING AND TRAPPING.

## MOOSE HUNTING IN THE MAINE WOODS.

BY LIEUTENANT PRESTON H. UBERROTH, U. S. R. M.

Of all the numerous species of large game to be found in the wilderness of Northern Maine, there is none whose pursuit affords grander sport to the expert rifleman than the elk, or moose (*Alces Malchis*). His habitat being the region of dense forests, and possessing keen eyesight, fine sense of smell, together with his intense fear of his natural enemy, man, render him one of the most difficult animals to approach, and he who would get within easy rifle range of the moose must, indeed, be a skillful hunter, unless he is fortunate enough to have the peculiar condition of the weather and country through which he is passing greatly in his favor.

The moose is the largest of the genus, and at the fore shoulder is much higher than the average horse. The head measures two feet in length, and, due to the enlargement of the nose and nostrils, is clumsily shaped. Its eyes are small and deeply set in the head, the ears long and hairy, and from the neck depends a heavy mane, the throat being covered with long, coarse hair. Its body is well-rounded, short and compact, with a tail not more than four inches long. Its legs are long, but firm and cleanly cut, and, from its large, overhanging lip, was once believed to have walked backward while grazing. Its movements are heavy and awkward, and when running it proceeds in a shambling trot, tossing its head from side to side with nose well up and horns thrown horizontally back, straddling its hind legs in order to avoid striking the foreheels and tripping. It is a solitary creature, and generally keeps out of sight and harm during the daytime. Its sense of hearing is very acute, and it is the most shy and wary of all the deer species, and owing to this fact the art of moose-hunting is considered the greatest of the hunter's acquirements.

During my autumn rambles in the Maine woods I have become convinced that the moose is increasing in number, wholly due to the stringent game laws that prohibit its wholesale slaughter at all seasons of the year. On a sandy, pine-girt beach where the cool, crystal-like water of the Kennebec winds its way about the foot of Squaw Mountain on its long journey from Moosehead Lake to the sea, we erect our temporary camp on a certain day late in the fall, and being tired and half-famished, our appetites whetted by the out-of-door life of our wild and Indian-like existence, we at once set to

work to kindle our fire and prepare our frugal repast with the greatest possible dispatch.

Our party consists of four white men and two Indian guides. The latter are fine, manly-looking fellows, of cheerful dispositions, retiring habits, and as we gather about the warm and glowing campfire, their brown, swarthy faces lighted up by its glare, I cannot recall when I ever saw so much laughter and bright, smiling eyes before.

We have with us two frail, birch-bark canoes belonging to our guides, and are of the kind exclusively employed by the moose hunters, who inhabit the shores of the lakes and rivers that skirt this vast, unbounded and trailless wilderness. They are little crafts and so light in weight that one is able to raise it with one hand, but is strong and roomy enough to carry four average men on an expedition of from five to six weeks.

It is a chilly, frost-laden night, and after a hearty supper on sweet venison steaks and a savory fry of speckled trout, we one by one roll ourselves in our heavy blanket and hug the fire closely as we lie down to catch a few hours' sleep. During the afternoon we had a light fall of snow, which has covered the ground and tipped the spruces and birches and neighboring mountain tops with its white, fleecy mantle. Before midnight the heavy, gray clouds had broken away, and the pale moon now peered through the rifts of flying scud.

One of the Indians, who had been keeping watch while we slept, aroused our party, and, after reluctantly rising to our feet and donning our hunter's garb, we grasp our rifles and are ready to take to our canoes until daybreak. Jack, my guide, soon has the boat launched, and, taking my seat amidships, my piece lying across my lap, we shove off and are soon paddling along near the edge of the river's bank into the stillness of the night. The second party lays its course down stream, while the third takes to the woods, where in the blackness of the forest the two hunters soon disappear from view. For more than an hour we glide quietly along, no sound meeting the ear but the gentle dipping of the paddle astern and the occasional cracking of dry branches as little avalanches of snow come pouring down through the leafless boughs of the trees.

Now, as we dart around sweeping curves and past



dark "lagoons," we surprise a stray duck or deer that has come down to drink, but, at catching sight of us, both are off before I have time to raise my piece. Great stately trees overhang the banks, under whose sweeping boughs my guide turns the prow of the canoe, and now and then, as a clearing is passed, I catch glimpses of the quartering moon which, like the "twilight gray has in her sober livery all things clad."

The wind dies away, the dark clouds pass over, and, one by one, the stars come out, until, at last the blue canopy above is studded with myriads of scintillating lights. Now the current becomes more sluggish, and the water grows darker and deeper as we pass through forest pools bedecked with lily-pods turned crimson by the crisp autumn wind. Trunks of fallen spruce and cedar extend out to us from either shore, their branches covered with decaying moss and driftwood. The opening grows higher and closer as we advance, the current increases in velocity, until we find ourselves skimming along over a rippling brook, which by degrees, develops into a seething rapids wherein the water grows shoaler, until at last our boat grates the bottom and is suddenly stopped by a mass of fallen cedars forming a plaited and interlocked barrier directly across the stream.

Jack jumps out, I quickly follow him, and, after toiling some time shoving away the debris, and lifting and hauling the boat over it, we succeed in reaching deeper water where our canoe again floats. Our difficulty over, we continue on for more than a mile, skirting the banks of this labyrinth of our primeval forest, then gliding swiftly on over more pebbly bars, through rapids and cataracts with an almost eyrie swiftness, the boat swirls round the broad crescent of a dark pool, and soon glides into the smooth waters of a lake environed by dense timber hills, overtopped by snow-crested mountains which stand out majestically in bold relief against the clear blue sky beyond.

"There might be a moose in that bog on the right," whispers Jack, raising his paddle from the water and permitting the canoe to proceed noiselessly toward the bank. I grasp my gun, the bow of the boat grounds upon the shore, while the Indian draws out his birch-bark horn, and by a succession of sounds resembling the grunts of the cow-moose, calls the beast, if one happens to be within range of the signal, down to the water's edge.

A more propitious night for hunting the moose rarely occurs, for there is a dead calm on the lake, and nothing will prevent our call being heard in all directions at a distance of at least two miles; then, again, there is little danger of the animal scenting, or winding us, and refusing to be allured from the cover of the forest.

We sit in silence, no sound but the occasional grunts

of the horn and the chattering of a squirrel overhead disturb the profound stillness. By and by, my guide thinks he hears an answer to his call. I listen, but detect nothing. The experienced ear of my man Friday, however, is not easily deceived, and suddenly a low bark comes from the silent wilderness. At each sound of the animal, a similar one is made on the horn, until at last it is evident that our much-coveted prize is drawing nearer, for so distinctly does its bark reach my ears that I raise my gun as if to shoot. In a low whisper, however, my guide tells me that the moose is still a good distance off. After a time the cry seems to die away, and then grow as loud as before, as if the animal had grown suspicious and is wandering away only to turn again and retrace his steps at the low, enticing sound of the iron.

This frequently happens, for in his blind roaming he will lose the direction, or upon winding you, will turn back and keep under cover, much to the suspense and anxiety of the impatient hunter. In another moment the sound from the forest is heard again, this time so loud and clear as to be almost upon us. He has at last got track of the birch-bark cow-moose, and is coming toward us in hot haste.

"Here he is!" whispers the Indian, and bounding through the underbrush, crashing and breaking the dry branches of the trees with his great heavy antlers, a shambling black mass plunges into the moonlight and stands in all its glory before me. There is time but for one single impulse, and that is—shoot. Instantly I bring my gun to my shoulder and empty its contents into the monarch of the forest. The baffled beast, as quick as a flash, turns to retreat, and, without a moment's hesitation, we leap out upon the bank and are after him. A few stealthy steps and we reach the edge of the wood. We pause to peer within, but nothing resembling a moose is to be seen anywhere. We pass from the moonlit waters of the lake into the deep gloom of the woods. The trees stand close together, their low, rotten branches making it exceedingly difficult to make rapid progress. I scramble on, eager to get one more shot at the animal. Jack is close behind me.

Through openings in the trees above, the moonlight pours in upon the snow, enabling me to discern crimson spots in the moose's track, and satisfying me that my shot did not fail of its mark. It is necessary that we should make our advance with the utmost caution, for the rustling of a withered leaf or the crackling of a decayed twig is sufficient to alarm the watchful animal. The moose when tracked has a peculiar habit of turning from its path and taking up its repose at some point near its retreat; in order that it may hear the slightest noise made by those in pursuit.



We press on in silence for some time, when a crashing near by causes Jack to exclaim:

"Here he comes! he's makin' for the lake. Look out!"

Peering ahead, I see the wounded moose, his eyes glaring in the moonbeam that falls across his path. With head down, his large branching horns extending forward, the hair on his neck bristling like the mane of a lion, and giving him a wild appearance, the incensed beast comes charging down upon us, leaving no doubt whatever in my mind that he is coming and that I must look out for myself.

The moose makes one dash for the Indian, who, being unarmed, scrambles up the nearest pine, just in time to clear the long antlers which fly by him. In an instant the enraged animal turns and begins stripping the bark from the tree by striking it with his horns and forefeet.

From behind a fallen trunk, I take in the situation at a glance. In the excitement of the moment, all thoughts of danger and of retreat leave me. I swing my gun to my face as the brute becomes aware of my presence and makes one desperate plunge in my direction. I glance along the shining barrel with my finger on the trigger. I fire. The immense black mass falls with a heavy thud in the snow at my feet, pierced through the heart.

"Bravo!" shouts Jack, as he comes sliding down the trunk of the tree in which he had taken refuge. "Ain't he a stunner? Never saw th' likes o' him afore," and he gives way to his joy over my victory in many sayings expressive of wonderment and surprise common to the vernacular of the backwoodsman.

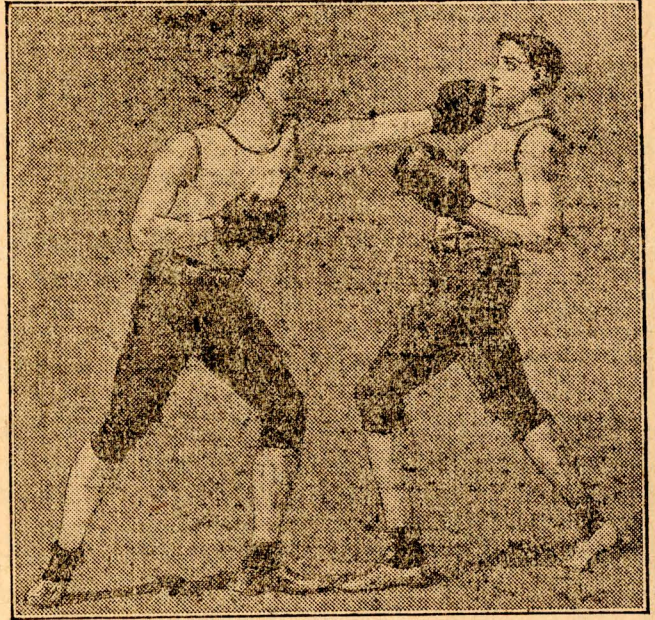
Upon examination, I find that my first shot penetrated the moose's left fore shoulder, the torture driving him desperate with rage and causing him to turn upon us. We at once set to work stripping the skin from the body, removing the head and legs, and cutting the remainder up into such parts as will permit our return with it to the canoe. After winding the huge pieces with stout withes, and having at last succeeded in stowing them in the bow, we shove off and are soon paddling over the lake with the prow of the boat turned toward the hunter's camp, greatly elated with the night's success.

Day is breaking, and in the trees above us can already be heard the bird's sweet song as it is borne away on the chill, frosty morning air, heralding the dawn of this crisp autumn day.

It is mid-day when we arrive at the camp, and find that the other canoe has returned, having met with luck equally as good as our own. Our moose weighs eight hundred pounds, his antlers forty pounds, and measures six feet from tip to tip.

Night again falls upon the moose hunters' camp, and fresh fuel is heaped upon the fires, the great logs glow anew, the flames crackle, and the flying embers leap on high through the big, black chimney. On rude couches of birch and spruce, with our feet to the fire's ruddy glare, we fall asleep to dreams of chattering squirrels, savage bears and terrified moose, with broad antlers of gigantic size, leaping out upon us from behind every tree.

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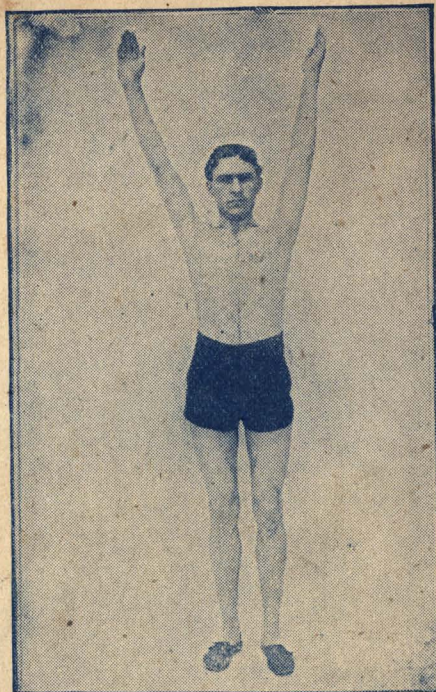
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